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THE ROOMS OF THE HOUSE OF ROMANOV.

BY COSMO RUSSELL.

TWENTY-ONE years ago this August an Emperor watched the first leaves begin to turn in the parks of Tsarskoe Selo. It was the last time a Romanov would see the autumn shadows fall on those dearly loved surroundings. One of the saddest paradoxes in history was in course of fulfilment. The Tsar, Nicholas II, a simple man and a devoted husband and father, had inherited the most turbulent throne in the world and now, as he gazed from the windows of the Alexander Palace, not only the throne he cherished but the life he most prized, to be alone and at home with his wife and family, were lost to him for ever. By the early days of September, 1917, the Russian Imperial family had been transferred from Tsarskoe to Tobolsk, and all hope that they would be allowed to live in honourable exile had been abandoned.

To-day the outward scene at Tsarskoe, now called Pushkin, has changed but little, and in the Alexander Palace the tragedy of the Russian monarchy assumes its fullest proportions. The visitor, who should see this last home of a Russian Emperor after the other and earlier palaces at Tsarskoe, can visualise this setting as the last scene in the drama of which he has seen the stage and perhaps even felt the presence of the principal players in their former apartments. A strange superstition dissuaded the rulers of the House of Romanov from occupying the rooms of their predecessors. In consequence, new styles rose to favour during the reign of their sponsor and closed when the reign

came to an end. There can be few royal palaces where the sense of period is more strongly developed and where so little overlapping has been allowed to take place.

Tsarskoe Selo lies in the hills to the east of Leningrad. The September sun is shining as we leave our hotel and the waters of the Neva are dancing as we bowl rather precariously along the Quai. We are rightly inspired to stop at the little Dutch summer palace built by Peter the Great. Dutch tiles, Dutch furniture, an enormous barometer, and windows looking over the water, bear witness to the tastes and leanings of the Tsar who 'opened the window to Europe and let progress into Russia.' It is a fitting introduction to the greater work in hand.

An hour's drive brings the tourist to Tsarskoe. This congeries of imperial palaces was started in the second quarter of the eighteenth century by the Italian Rastrelli, architect to the Empress Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great. As we drive up, it is impossible to avoid a swift mental comparison with the approach to Versailles. There is the same broad classical sweep, broken in one wing by the presence of a church tower. Three golden domes, onion-shaped, with chains and heavy gold crosses, still greet the traveller on his arrival at the palace of Elizabeth. This magnificent boisterous lady was a fitting daughter of her great father, combining an intense interest in the culture of the West with that generous love of external splendour, common to the Oriental ruler. The interior of Rastrelli's church is of blue malachite, with heavy baroque gilding. Although evoking in the Western mind a certain restlessness, this decoration forms a fitting introduction to that strange admixture of Western baroque with Russian material and more particularly with malachite, which is the dominating characteristic of Russian baroque art.

The exterior of the Elizabethan palace is of white stucco covered with iron tracery. To-day it shows signs of wear, though it must be admitted, in all fairness, that the Russian Royal Palaces do not usually require the assistance of a Rockefeller to maintain them. The Government sees to their upkeep. Inside a long line of reception rooms leads up to the long throne room, where the sunlight dances in through a double tier of windows. Here Elizabeth used to give balls with a lavishness only paralleled by that of Versailles. The last time a ball was held in this room was the occasion of an international Congress of scientists when the delegates were the guests of the Soviet Government. Fantasy might fashion an amusing situation. Supposing the ghost of Peter's daughter had graced this twentieth-century party of eminent scientists with her imperial presence! History suggests that she would have been highly entertained by their presence in her palace, while they, in their turn, might have repaid her hospitality by solving some of her trying personal problems. Elizabeth for all her intelligence was intensely superstitious. There were times when she positively feared to go to bed. On those occasions she often slept in the throne room where thousands of gold candles had previously shone on the assembled company.

The throne room is seventy-two feet long. The tracery of this vast apartment winds in massive profusion. Russian baroque is noticeable for its broad sweeps. The decoration is carried out on a larger scale than is usually encountered in Italy and Central Europe. Traditional Western features are none the less present. The acanthus leaf is popular. So are the quiver and the arrow. But the association of gold tracery with various coloured marbles and malachites, and later in the eighteenth century with coloured stucco patterns, gives to this example of Russian internal decoration its

individuality. Against this sumptuousness, it is interesting to note a simple ikon hanging high in a corner. To this day no room has been deprived of this essential feature.

A Germanic touch is provided in the Elizabethan palace by the famous Amber Room, built by the German, A. Shluter, and presented to Peter the Great by Frederick William I of Prussia in exchange for fifty-five of the tallest men in Russia—recruits for the Prussian army!!

Elizabeth basked in the glories of Rastrelli. Catharine II, the wife of the unstable Peter II, succeeded Elizabeth after a short interval as the mistress of Tsarskoe and eventually brought Charles Cameron to the Russian Court. Cameron was a Scotsman, who had worked under Flaxman in England and had come under the influence of Adam. Catharine herself was a German and a stranger. With her the spirit of science and enlightenment predominated over the more lavish emotionalism of the Romanovs. It was natural that she and her principal architect, while avoiding the profuse extravagance of Rastrelli, should pay an increasing attention to essential detail. Cameron was a mathematical genius and Catharine gave him a gloriously free hand. The school of Adam was given a chance to flourish in an entirely new setting and, with the rich choice of working material at his disposal, Cameron created a new palace which remains unique in history both for the mathematical problems which it sets the student of architecture and for the intricacies of decoration with which it dazzles the artist. Cameron altered some of Rastrelli's work, but in the main he kept to the old Russian tradition of building on. The southern wing of Tsarskoe is his creation. Cameron's enfilade is three hundred metres long. On the lower ground floor, beneath the enfilade and looking on to the garden, are a series of small intimate rooms, which were used in the nineteenth

century by Nicholas I, and particularly by Alexander II. In the later part of Catharine's reign these rooms were sometimes given over to her grandsons, the young Grand Dukes. Their close proximity to her own apartments enabled her to keep an eye on the princes.

To return to Catharine herself. While stucco and arabesques were striking the principal note in the reception rooms of the new palace, which rapidly grew out of the old, the cult of simplicity at the end of the eighteenth century made the Empress desire a suite of informal private apartments for her own use. Gold was falling temporarily from favour as the basis of interior decoration. Charles Cameron designed Catharine a 'Silver Study.' This room can hardly be called informal, as it has all the dimensions of a State reception room. It is lined with silver mirrors. The intervening spaces were originally fitted with silver decoration. Paul I, however, had the silver removed and covered the vacant spaces with paintings designed by Guarengui.

The last drawing-room, which Cameron built for Catharine, reflected an increasingly popular taste. It was Chinese with black lacquered walls and fantastic arabesques. Under a table we found a large musical box, with a label entitled 'Voix Celestes.' After a little coaxing on the part of a willing guide, it played a series of Europeanised Chinese melodies. Doubtless, it was given to the last Tsar and placed on his instructions in these suitable surroundings.

West of this room is a small Cameron dining-room. Soubov, the last favourite of the Empress, is supposed to have waited in this room for the news of Catharine's death. It is surrounded by French windows, surmounted by an upper tier, which represent a remarkable geometrical feat. Hollowed tunnels in the ceiling lead to these upper windows,

and on the walls of the tunnels the refracted light illuminates pastoral scenes. This is an interesting example of Cameron's mathematical gifts. Outside the main palace he provides another proof of this particular bent in the Agate rooms, which may have served as conservatories. Here the geometrical pattern of the ceiling is reminiscent of fourteenth-century Gothic.

On the other side of the Chinese drawing-room and facing south are a chain of small rooms which were Catharine's private apartments in the last years of her reign. In the chamber where she died the walls are of white marble. Thin glass columns stuffed with purple gauze mingle with light gold and blue arabesques to give a strangely unreal effect. It is as if a bathroom had been suddenly furnished in the style of a drawing-room. A second sitting-room next door is fitted in the same style, save that the glass columns in this case are packed with blue gauze. There are two small Empire writing-tables of light Russian wood—probably birch. Here Catharine worked, face to face with her minister. There are silver inkstands on the desks and that of the Empress is graced with a small bust of Voltaire, and a suitable inscription in verse. That constant reminder of the little Frenchman must have evoked strange thoughts in Catharine's mind during those last troublesome weeks of her reign, when all Europe was rocked by the French Revolution.

A brief stroll in the garden and a glance at the lake give time for reflection before an energetic guide persuades us to visit the apartments of Russia's rulers in the nineteenth century. Tsarskoe is primarily the creation of the eighteenth century. But Alexander I and II were frequent visitors during their reigns, and their private apartments, still furnished with a plenitude of prints, photographs, albums, and

personal possessions, leave a sense of the past which it would be difficult to equal elsewhere. In one room is a whole set of mounted models, representing the regiments of Nicholas I. In another—the study of Alexander II—lies rather ironically an enormous volume, bound in red vellum. It is an account with pictures of the proclamation of the German Emperor at Versailles.

The rooms used by Alexander I have a particular interest ; not only because no hand has disturbed their essential serenity for more than a hundred years, but because of the strange fascination which this enigmatical character has always exercised over Russians and Europeans alike. Alexander's writing-room, furnished with two magnificent Empire desks, covered with papers, remains as it was. On a side table are a pair of beautifully polished pistols. There is a big table in the middle of the room, covered with official boxes and two long cylinders for despatches, one of which is marked ' for the Tsar's own hand.' We continue through two minute rooms, for the use of the *valet de chambre*, till we come to the bedroom. To-day the bed stands against the wall, surrounded by curtains, though our guide informs us that the Tsar is supposed to have slept in the middle of the room. Underneath a wall mirror is a small stand for swords, with a gold rail. Near by hang the Tsar's uniforms of red and green. It is the room of a soldier and an administrator ; perhaps of a dreamer ! Who knows ? The mind and intentions of that strange personality remain wrapped in mystery for all time.

This visit completes an extremely busy morning. After a temporary farewell from a sympathetic guide, who is to rejoin us in the afternoon, we proceed to the Alexander Park and devour a picnic lunch under the trees.

Hard by a lake in the Alexander Park stands the Alexander

Palace, that modest and poignant reminder of the greatest of all Russian tragedies. Built by Catharine II for her grandson, Alexander, this palace was the last residence of a Russian Tsar. The Italian architect, Guarengui, finished his work in 1796. Catharine died in that year. Before her death she was able to lead her favourite grandson into the central hall of the palace and stand with him by the garden entrance on the opposite side of the room. From here a flight of stone steps led to a fine avenue of trees, and at the far end a pavilion could be discerned, half-hidden in summer by the green foliage. Was there a note of misgiving in the mind of the Empress? By that same door Nicholas II and his family left the Alexander Palace for ever, when the cars came to take them on the first stage of the journey to the cellar of Ekaterinburg. To the right of the hall, facing the park, is a drawing-room arranged as a private chapel. Here the Tsar and his family attended Mass before departure. The room has been left intact.

Nicholas II redecorated a number of rooms for his private use. Much has been said of the terrible bourgeois taste of these rooms, of the oak fittings and interior balconies, reminiscent of cottage architecture, of the numerous photographs, of the seven hundred ikons and religious pictures that decorate the bedroom and the little alcove behind. But the furniture and decoration reflected the taste of a period. While noticeable to-day in the palace of an Emperor, preserved as an historical museum, they were none the less evident in many humbler homes of a previous generation. If it is a general characteristic of nobility to show good taste, there have been times when both royalty and nobility in all countries have given way to that same profusion of knick-knacks and photographs, which marks the rooms of the late Tsaritsa. It is hardly fitting for the visitor to scoff at the

apotheosis of Victorianism. Rather let him realise that he is in the presence of supreme tragedy, not very far removed from his own front door.

In the corner room on the south side, where the Guarengui decoration remains, there is a switchback, once used by the royal children. Three large toy motor-cars are further testimony of those childhood days. To the foreign visitor it is surprising that these recollections of a happy childhood do not arouse feelings of affection towards their late rulers in the minds of Soviet citizens. Are not these sentimental reminders a potential source of danger to the régime? Perhaps some carefully guarded instances of loyalty do still exist in the U.S.S.R. But the Russian character is able to accept the past as a closed book in a manner incomprehensible to the Western mind. Moreover, twenty years of State Socialism have done their work. Parties of Soviet citizens pass in a steady stream through the royal apartments. The Romanovs themselves are not so much living memories as chapters in the State history books. A toy motor-car may seem as remote to the Russian visitor as the Scythian gold in the Hermitage Museum, while the treasures of the Tsar's children are to-day the heirlooms of the Russian State and the strange preserve of the social historian. And yet no Dryasdust has left his mark upon these pathetic toys. In the most tragic way they seem to await their former owners. Even the sliding mat remains in its place at the top of the switchback!

The note of domesticity increases as we pass to a balcony room, full of familiar objects: picture books, games of halma and ludo, transfers and drawing books. One of our party takes a book from a table. It is a copy of Queen Victoria's Jubilee Service. The flyleaf contains the one word 'Alix'—the name of the Tsaritsa. Round the walls are

rows of photographs. We wander here and there, finding new objects of interest. 'There is the Princess Royal!—and the Kaiser! I wonder why they left him there after 1914? Perhaps he was put back later.' Two photographs stand out in particular: Queen Alexandra in her coronation robes, 'From Aunt Alix, with love—1902,' and a smiling Tsarevitch in a sailor suit. There is also a small undistinguished photograph of Rasputin with a few unintelligible lines in his own handwriting.

The wall of the Empress's bedroom is covered with ikons. Doubtless many of these were presents. One picture represents our Lord, stretching out His hands to the Tsar, Tsaritsa and Tsarevitch. Passing by a glass wardrobe, containing the dresses of the Empress, very well kept, we enter a small dark panelled dining-room. Next door a Soviet guide is lecturing to Soviet citizens in the Emperor's bathroom. He is showing the Tsar's wardrobe and saying that he was never out of uniform, military parades playing the principal part in his existence. The bath itself is a spacious swimming-pool and shower-bath, with a flight of steps leading into the water. This room leads into a small private study, furnished with an exceptionally wide divan. Here the Tsarevitch used to play. Because of the hæmophilia from which he suffered, the sofa was especially constructed to mitigate the danger of his falling off. Finally, we come to the billiard room, which is the last of the private apartments. On the outbreak of war, the billiard table was covered with a huge map of the Front and the billiard cues were removed. The map remains to-day. A flight of stairs, built of heavy mahogany, leads to a balcony and a recess, where the imperial councils might well be overheard by an unofficial listener. Dark-grey malachite pillars, with heavy gold decoration, strike a sombre note against the wood. This is not a cheerful

room, nor indeed has it any reason to be so. Twenty-one years after it is still inexpressibly sad.

The visit is over. We leave impressed by the strange illogical respect for the past, which no revolution has managed to eradicate from the Russian character. Propaganda alone is an insufficient explanation for the beautifully kept rooms, where no dust is allowed to mar the books and possessions of their former owners. Perhaps many Russians are unaware of the real fate of the last Tsar. Perhaps they think that he vanished into Siberia, where so many of the best people in Russia go nowadays, including their own parents and brothers and sisters and cousins. And perhaps, if this is the case, it is the best compliment that his former subjects have ever paid to the memory of the last of the Romanovs.

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS.

BY MARY LUTYENS.

'WHAT was the last thing you remember?' she asked.

'Well,' he replied, 'Muriel and Tommy got into one taxi and I said I'd drop you in another. We started out and then suddenly I felt a terrific crash and the next thing I knew was that I was sitting here with you—wherever here is.'

'I don't remember more than that either. I didn't see another car or anything running into us, did you?'

'No, I didn't. I don't remember anything more at all, though the whole evening before that seems particularly vivid. How did you happen to be on the party, anyway?'

'I'll tell you,' she said; 'it was like this: I was all alone and was going to bed for dinner when Muriel rang up and asked me to dine and go to a play. She told me that the girl who had been going had chucked at the last moment and she badly needed another woman and would I be an angel and help her out.'

'Yes,' he said, 'it was a girl called Eileen Sommerville. Muriel had told me she was coming. Thank God she didn't come or I should be dead with her now.'

'I was awfully glad to come because I adore plays and can never afford to go to them unless I am taken. Do you know Muriel and Tommy well?'

'Yes, Tommy is one of my oldest friends. We were at Eton together, and I've known Muriel for years also. I wouldn't be surprised if they are going to be more cut up over my death than anybody. But I was awfully angry

with Muriel this evening for making us go on to the Four Hundred. I was dog-tired and longing to go to bed, and, anyhow, what is the point of going to a night club in a party ?'

'There were only the four of us !'

'Yes, but you don't want to go to a night club with two of your oldest friends and a strange woman you have no particular interest in. I can say that to you now because I feel that there is nothing I can't say to you now, and it's no good your being offended with me because there's not a cat about the place you can talk to if you don't talk to me.'

'I wonder where exactly we are,' she said. 'It's so dark and yet I can see you perfectly, but goodness knows where the light comes from which you are lit by.'

'It's rather like being imagined in somebody's mind,' he said. 'But I'm really more interested to know how long we have been here than where we are. It might have been half an hour and it might have been a hundred years.'

'I'm sure it's more than half an hour,' she said, 'and yet it can't be very long because you don't look a bit tired or crumpled. Do I ?'

'No, you look as fresh as a daisy.'

'Look at your watch again,' she said. 'It may have begun to go by now.'

He took out his watch from his waistcoat pocket. 'No,' he said, 'it's still five-and-twenty to four. It must have stopped when we had the smash. I know it was nearly half-past three when we left the Four Hundred.'

'I suppose we really are dead,' she said.

'I don't think there can be a doubt about it. What else could we be ?'

'We might just be knocked out.'

'Oh, no. I was concussed once out hunting. I was unconscious, apparently, for nearly seven hours, but that was just a blank.'

'Perhaps this will seem a blank too when we wake up. Perhaps we shan't remember anything about it.'

'That's possible,' he said, 'but I think we must be dead because I feel so well. I drank quite a bit to-night and I was very tired, but I haven't got the vestige of a hangover now and I feel very wide-awake indeed. How do you feel?'

'Absolutely marvellous—so well, in fact, that nothing seems to matter very much—so well that I can't really worry as much over our predicament as I ought to do.'

'Which only goes to show,' he said, 'that ninety per cent. of one's normal worry and depression is due to liver.'

'But do you think this is going to be like this for ever? We can't just sit here throughout eternity talking about ourselves.'

'What are we sitting on for that matter?' he asked.

'It feels to me as if it might be the taxi seat. Is that how it feels to you?'

'Yes, but I wouldn't dare stand up or move about very much, would you?'

'Oh, no, but then I always feel like that even in an aeroplane.'

'I've felt the ground,' he said, 'it's just like an ordinary rough carpet.'

'It's a pity we can't see anything, and yet it isn't like being in the dark, is it? There's no eye-strain and I can see you as plainly as if it were broad daylight.'

'Yes,' he said, 'I can see you too, but everything else is opaquely black. I can feel the floor at my feet and the seat I am sitting on, but I stretched out my hands just now and

there was nothing there. If we were still in the taxi we should be able to feel the sides and the roof. Put out your hand and see if you can feel anything on your side.'

'I hardly dare. . . . No, there's nothing there at all, but I'm quite sure this can't go on much longer. Something will suddenly happen. It's rather frightening, like being in the Ghost Train at Olympia.'

'Are you frightened?' he asked.

'No, not with you here, but I should be if I was alone. How terrifying it must be to die quite alone, but I'm not frightened with you here. You are very strong. I felt how strong you were when I was dancing with you. I don't suppose your strength is going to be of much use in the world where we are now, but it is comforting all the same. You give me a feeling of confidence. I felt that the first moment I saw you this evening. You're not frightened, are you?'

'No, I'm interested, but it is hard to grasp the realisation that we are never going to be on earth again, never see our friends again, never get the chance to finish all the things we have started and left so incomplete, never be able to do all those things we promised ourselves to do before we died. When that realisation really penetrates I suppose we shall get an awful feeling of terror and horror and despair, but it doesn't seem possible to realise it now.'

'Are there many things you wanted to do that you haven't done?' she asked.

'Yes, any amount. I have spent so much of my life drifting and have wasted so many years and so many opportunities. I have always been handicapped by having too much money. I had an aunt who left me her entire fortune, and as well as that my parents are very well off and I am the only child. I have always had the knowledge that I

would inherit considerable sums of money. Necessity is the only efficient slave-driver.'

'What would you like to have done if you hadn't been rich?' she asked.

'I have always wanted to be an architect. I am an architect for that matter, but I'm afraid I only play at it. I design house after house, but they never get further than becoming toy models and no one ever lives in them but children's dolls.'

'Why don't you build yourself a house,' she asked, 'if you are so rich?'

'Because I have got a house already—I think, one of the most beautiful houses in the whole of England. It is in Dorset and it was built by Vanbrugh who was, I must confess, a much better architect than I could ever hope to be. It is a lovely house, and it has suddenly occurred to me that I should like to show it to you almost more than anything else in the world. It is supposed to be haunted. The ghost has been seen on several occasions.'

'What sort of ghost is it?'

'Well, it is supposed to be a woman. There is no particular story attached to her, but she only appears in the garden and people who have seen her say that she looks as if she is holding a child by the hand, but the child itself has never been seen.'

'Haven't you ever seen her?'

'No, not actually, but I have often been conscious of an unseen presence, but not a frightening presence—a benign presence rather, and one that fills one with incredible happiness. I always feel it welcoming me when I go back there after having been away for some time, and I have come to count on it and look forward to it. I really sometimes think that it is because of the ghost that I love the

place so much. But it is very lovely as well. How I should like to show it to you.'

'How I should like to see it,' she said. 'Perhaps we shall become ghosts. Isn't it funny how easy we are finding it to talk to each other and yet at dinner and in the intervals of the play and at the Four Hundred I thought you were the most difficult man to talk to I had ever met?'

'You were talking to Tommy most of the time. But I remember when we were dancing and I was trying to make conversation, you said, "Let's not talk, shall we?" and I was so grateful to you.'

'Then you did feel a little faint stirring of sympathy toward me?' she asked.

'Yes, at that moment you became important to me.'

'In the whole of my life I have never attracted anyone by my looks,' she said. 'People never really like me till they get to know me, but when once they do like me they never stop.'

He laughed.

'I'm not being unduly modest or unduly conceited,' she said. 'It's true.'

'I believe you,' he said, 'and I'm getting to like you so much already that very soon, I expect, the idea of spending the whole of eternity with you will more than compensate for all the things on earth I have left undone.'

'What other things are there?' she asked.

'Well, it sounds silly, but for one thing I do regret not having been nicer to my mother. I really adore her, but whenever she is there she fills me with such vast irritation that I can't help showing it and I know it hurts her. If I had another chance I'd be kinder and more controlled. And then, for another thing, I have always wanted children more than anything in the world—or one child at least.'

'Why haven't you had them?' she asked. 'Have you never wanted to get married?'

'I was married,' he replied, 'but it was not a success. I realised at once that it was not a success and I knew that if ever we had children I should never get free, because I couldn't have borne it if they had had to spend half the year away from me. I did get free, but since then—that was five years ago—I have not let myself be tempted to marry again. I shall have to be very, very sure next time—so sure that I don't suppose it will ever happen again.'

'I have a child,' she said. 'A daughter. She is the only reason why I mind being dead. I mind about her dreadfully because I am the only person she has in the world, and she is only seven. I don't know what will happen to her now.'

'What about her father?' he asked.

'She hasn't got a father—I mean not a proper one. Shall I tell you about it?'

'Yes, tell me about it.'

'Do you really want to know?'

'Yes, everything about you has become of fearful importance.'

'I don't know that it's a very unusual story,' she said. 'I fell in love with a married man and he with me. We both knew it for a long time and knew the other knew it without anything being acknowledged between us, and then one day we were thrown together in unusual circumstances. Quite by chance we met in Paris and found that we were both alone staying the night there before returning to London the next morning. We had dinner together and went and saw Grock afterwards at the Cirque Medrano. It is the only time I have ever seen him. We spent the night together and the next day we went back to London, and the morning after that I got a letter from him saying

that he could never see me again. He had a wife and children. He didn't want to break up his home and he didn't want to have an affair. He may be a man of great principle and courage or he may just not have loved me enough : that is one of the things I shall never know. Anyway, I wrote back saying that I understood. He said in his letter that he would never forget that night and would always treasure it, and I said that I would never forget it either. I was desperately hurt, and then I found later that I was going to have a baby, and it will perhaps seem odd to you, but I was pleased about it. It came at a moment when life seemed at its darkest and emptiest. I told my mother and she was distraught because I was only twenty and just a girl living at home then, but she was really rather wonderful about it and said she would take me to Berlin to have it removed so that no one, not even my father, need know. But when I told her that whatever happened I was going to have it, she thought first that I must be mad, and then, when I was adamant, that I must be horribly wicked and depraved, and she was all the more angry because I refused to tell her the name of the father. Well, to cut my story short, I had the baby, and I called myself Mrs., and went to live on my own in a flat. That was made possible because I had four hundred a year of my own which nobody could take away from me. What would have happened if I hadn't had a penny I don't know, but somehow or other I should have had the baby—I'm sure of that. I had always done a certain amount of modelling and now I took it up seriously and began making little porcelain figures. I have made quite a bit of money out of them, and I have my own kiln now and do the firing myself. It's enchanting work, and that's how I have been living for the last seven years.'

'Did the father ever know about the child?'

'No, I never told him, and I have never told a single soul in the world who he is. I have met him occasionally by accident, but we have never spoken more than a dozen words to each other. My family have more or less forgiven me now, and the new friends I have made, like Muriel, don't know that I have never been married. I have to keep it a secret for my daughter's sake.'

'Why did you so want to have the baby?' he asked.

'It never seriously occurred to me for a moment not to have it. I had loved him and I just couldn't bear to think of that love being altogether fruitless. It seemed so right. It is only in the last half-hour, for the first time in all these years, that I have questioned the right and the wrong of it. I don't know what will happen to her now. I should like to have lived until she was grown up and happily married.'

'Won't your parents adopt her?'

'Yes, I suppose that's what will happen, but it won't be the same. She is so very, very much my responsibility.'

'Did you never think of getting married?' he asked.

'Not seriously. There have been one or two people who wanted to marry me, but I haven't loved them. I could never marry anyone I didn't love, but I have always felt that one day someone would come along to take care of us.'

'Do you still love the child's father?'

'Oh, no, but I still remember what it is to love. I'm glad I knew it once, at least, before I died. I wouldn't really mind being dead if it wasn't for the thought of Betty—oh, and there's another thing I've just thought of, but it's rather bathos after what I've been telling you. This afternoon I left a blue sapphire ring in the lavatory at the hair-dresser's. I rang up when I got home, but they were shut

and I was going to ring up the first thing to-morrow morning. I'm afraid they won't know it's mine and I should so have liked Betty to have it because it's the only good jewel I've got. It's ridiculous to think that, if I suddenly found now that I wasn't dead, the first thing I'd do would be to ring up the hairdresser's.'

'If I suddenly found now that I wasn't dead,' he said slowly, 'the first thing I'd do would be to ask you to marry me.'

'Out of chivalry?' she said, smiling.

'Not at all, but because I have fallen tremendously in love with you. Do you remember what I said to you just now about having to be very, very sure?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I am very, very sure. Do you know, you are lovelier than anyone I have ever seen in my life?'

'But I am not lovely. I am not even pretty.'

'But you are, you know. I didn't think it when I first saw you this evening, but I began to be aware of it when we were dancing and now I know it.'

'I believe it was you all the time who was going to come along and take care of us. Isn't it sad that I shouldn't have found you till I died? And I don't even know your name. They called you David, didn't they?'

'Yes, David.'

'David . . . David . . . David,' and her voice became suddenly anguished. 'Oh, David, it's going to happen. I feel it, do you? Something is going to happen. Oh, I should be so frightened if you weren't here. Hold me, David; hold me. I am so frightened of being alone.'

He put out his arms and as they closed round her she melted out of them, and he had only a fading remembrance of her presence and her warmth as he slipped away from her

into consciousness. Later he would have given all he possessed in the world to be certain that he had held her in his arms even for a second. He stared wide-eyed and bewildered at the white ceiling.

The first question he asked was, 'Where is she?'

'Sh—sh,' said the nurse.

A blinding pain struck him between the eyes and knocked the speech out of him, but in his mind he went on asking, Where is she? Where is she?

It was not till the next day they told him she was dead. Her skull had been fractured and she had died immediately. 'No,' he said, 'it must have been at least an hour.' But they told him she was dead by the time the ambulance arrived. She had never recovered consciousness. 'No,' he said angrily, 'no, it must have been at least an hour. You don't know anything about it.'

They did not argue with him. They allowed him to babble on. He had been badly concussed, poor fellow, and several ribs were broken.

He kept asking to see Muriel, but they would not allow him to see anyone for three days, and then it was his mother who came to stand by his bed. 'You are no use to me,' he said to her. 'Please get Muriel for me. I must see Muriel. Please get her for me.'

'My darling boy,' she said.

'Please go away,' he said. 'You are no use to me. I need help. I need Muriel. She is the only person who may be able to help. I am in dreadful trouble.'

His mother whispered with the nurse at the door. A wave of anguish broke over him. He cried out loud. The nurse came hurrying to him.

The next day Muriel came to see him.

'They won't let you stay long,' he said, speaking very

fast, 'so you must listen carefully and do what I ask you and answer all my questions. It is of desperate importance. Now first of all tell me quickly everything you know about her. What was her name? I never took it in.'

'Whose name?'

'The woman who was killed, of course.'

'But, David dear, you mustn't hold yourself responsible . . .'

'Oh, for God's sake, tell me,' he shouted.

The nurse appeared at the bedside. 'I think you had better go now.'

'No, nurse, she's got to stay.'

The nurse and Muriel exchanged meaning looks and Muriel went away. David began to sob. 'What is it?' asked the nurse.

'She is so frightened without me.'

The doctor gave instructions that the patient was to be kept very quiet and not allowed to see anybody for the next day or two, so it was almost a week after the accident that David had his first satisfactory talk with Muriel.

'Her name was Frances Baker,' said Muriel. 'No, I hadn't known her very long. About seven or eight months, I should think. I found her very useful because it isn't often that you come across an attractive, unattached woman in London who can play bridge and never minds being asked at the last moment and always seems to be disengaged.'

'How did you first meet her?'

'I met her first at lunch with a friend, and she told me that she did porcelain figures, and I was interested and said I should like to see them and she took me down to her kiln the next day. Her figures were exquisite. I bought one.'

'What is it like?' he asked.

'It is of a woman holding a child by the hand. It is very simple, but it has tremendous charm and grace. It was a theme that must have appealed to her because there were several like it, only in different positions, but they all seemed to be of the same woman and the same child.'

'Where can one buy her things?'

'I don't know. I got mine from her direct.'

'Where did she live?'

'She had a flat in Dorset Street.'

'Did you ever go there?'

'Yes, I went there once.'

'Did you see her daughter?'

'Yes, a darling little girl.'

He wanted to ask her about the funeral but could not bring himself to do so. 'Do you know what has happened to the daughter?' he asked.

'I believe she has gone to live with her maternal grandparents. She doesn't seem to have any relatives on her father's side. I think there must have been some mystery about him. I never heard Frances mention him, and the woman I first met her with at lunch told me that they had been divorced under particularly disagreeable circumstances.'

'Do you know the name of the grandparents?'

'No, I'm afraid I don't.'

'Muriel, listen,' he said. 'Will you do something for me? Do you by any chance know the name of her hair-dresser?'

'No, whatever do you want to know that for?'

'Do you think you could find it out?'

'I might be able to.'

'Well, do, there's an angel. On the afternoon of the day she was killed she left a blue sapphire ring in the lavatory there. She rang up, but they were shut and she was going

to ring up first thing in the morning. Find out who they are and go there and get the ring and bring it to me and I will see that Betty gets it.'

'Who's Betty?'

'Oh, she's the daughter.'

'You seem to know more about her than I do. When did you have time to learn all these things?'

'I don't know,' he said truthfully. 'But please do that for me. Will you? And bring it to me to-morrow?'

'I'll try, but even if I discover who they are and find that the ring is still there, I don't suppose they'll give it to me.'

'You can say you were her best friend and that the task of recovering it has been delegated to you by her mother. Will you try? It is so important. You see, it is the only good jewel she had.'

'Did you fall in love with her that night?' asked Muriel suddenly.

'Yes,' he replied.

'My dear, I'm so sorry, but it couldn't have gone very deep, could it, just in one evening?'

'It wasn't just one evening.'

'Why, had you met her before?'

'No.'

'Was it love at first sight?'

'Oh, no, I didn't love her till she died. Or perhaps she wasn't dead then, or perhaps she was. I don't know.'

'What do you mean?'

'I don't know,' he said. 'I don't know anything, but what I would like to know is whether I would have loved her if she hadn't died. I think I would—in fact, I'm sure of it because I don't think there has ever been a time when I haven't loved her.'

Muriel looked puzzled. 'Well, I must be going,' she said. 'I don't understand half you're saying, but I'll try and get the ring for you.'

'Will you? And bring it to-morrow? And will you also bring the little china figure?'

'All right.'

Muriel returned the next day and she had the ring with her. 'I managed to get hold of her maid,' she said, 'who told me the name of the hairdresser and I went round there. They did not know who it belonged to and had been keeping it until someone claimed it.'

She gave it to him and he let it lie in the palm of his left hand while he cupped his right hand over it. It gave him comfort. 'Did you bring the statue?' he asked.

'Yes, it's here.' When she came in she had put a parcel down on the chair with her bag and gloves, and now she picked it up and unwrapped the little china statuette and stood it on the table by his bed. It was of white porcelain and the figure of the woman was about eighteen inches high. She held a girl child by the hand, but the child was stooping as if picking a flower, and straining on to her hand. The woman was looking down at her, smiling.

He gazed at it for a long time in silence. At last he said, 'It is a perfect self-portrait.'

'Of Frances!' exclaimed Muriel, 'but it's not a bit like her.'

'It's the living image of her,' he said. 'It's exactly how she smiled when she said to me, "Out of chivalry?"'

'But it's no more like her than I am,' protested Muriel. 'I should say it was a purely imaginary person. It's certainly not Frances.'

He turned his eyes to Muriel. 'Isn't it really like her?' he asked.

'No, not a bit.'

'You are probably right,' he said. 'It probably is an imaginary person—at least she probably thought it was, but do you realise—what has only just occurred to me—that one cannot create anything or imagine anything that is not oneself? That woman is Frances: you don't know it and she didn't know it, but I do.'

'I think you're a bit crazy,' said Muriel.

'Will you let me have it?' he asked. 'I'll give you anything in the world for it.'

'Of course not, I'll gladly give it to you.'

'Thank you. That's sweet of you.'

There was silence between them for a little while. He pressed the ring tightly in the palms of his hands. 'I must find Betty,' he said suddenly. 'I have decided to adopt her.'

'Now I know you really are crazy,' said Muriel.

'On the contrary, I have never been saner or more determined about anything in my life.'

'But her grandparents will never part with her, and why should they? A perfectly strange man?'

'They won't be able to refuse when I have done with them. I can give her everything she can possibly want, and I am certain that I know better than anyone else in the world how her mother would like her to be brought up.'

'But why do you want to adopt her?'

'Because,' he said slowly, 'she is so very, very much my responsibility.'

REINDEER ROUND-UP.

BY E. M. HINDS.

OLLA would be there ; Olla, whom she had not seen since the great spring trek.

Again she recalled those few sweet weeks of travelling with pulka and reindeer over the snow-clad tracts ; and the shy glances they had stolen at one another across the camp fire. Then had come the parting of the ways. He must go with his kith and kin to the north, she with hers to the south ; for in these directions lay the summer grazing-grounds of the tribes' respective herds. As Aina had watched the distance growing between them she noted with joy that Olla looked back.

That was three months ago and she had not seen him since. But to-morrow, the day when all would be setting out for the autumn round-up and sorting of the herds, they would once more approach one another ; he walking about twenty miles south to the stockades, she going the same distance north.

Twice had Olla hoped to see her since the spring, yet each time he had been disappointed. She had not been to the two previous round-ups, for girls do not work with reindeer when there are men and boys at hand. Fortune favoured her on this occasion, as her only brother was away guiding a tourist over the mountains, and he had not yet returned.

With special care she braided her hair and donned her new cap. Dare she wear her silver brooch, the one only worn on Sundays ? And her best neckerchief ?

No ! Perhaps it would be wisest to carry them inside the blouse of her tunic until she reached the stockades. Old Inga Partapuoli, with whom she was to go, had an unpleasant knack of noticing things. But no doubt all women with six handsome unmarried sons are ready to suspect eligible spinsters of husband-hunting. Little did Aina realise that on several occasions Lars Partapuoli had looked at her with an unusually tender expression. And his mother had understood.

The powerful sun blazed down from a clear blue sky, when, bearing their heavy packs upon their backs, the young girl and her companion set off up the steep hill through the birchwood. Aina, walking behind, watched old Inga's scalp turn from pink to crimson, and beads of perspiration run down the thin strands of greying hair. So she suggested sitting down to eat berries before entering the long stony tracks above the regions of plant growth. Not that she needed to stop. She could have walked the twenty miles without a rest, but she remembered old Aunt Rasti telling of an elderly Lapp woman who didn't like the young girls to think she couldn't keep up with them. She had gone so fast that her heart had given out and she had dropped dead on the trail.

But Inga Partapuoli intended to take her time. 'It is no good hurrying when we have all day before us,' she remarked, when, after eating a great many blue-berries, she sat back on her heels and started to fill her pipe.

Aina thought of the tent she was carrying. She knew it would take some considerable time to get comfortable for the night if they camped on the bare hill where the stockades were situated. There would be at least an extra mile to walk for wood and water. Her companion read her

thoughts, for she said, 'We are not going all the way to-day. We are only going as far as Henrick Tomma's old kâta. He says we may sleep there. It will be warmer than in a tent and we can get up early in the morning so as to see the herds enter the enclosures.'

So Aina abandoned all hope of seeing Olla that day.

Never had she made such a slow journey, and never had a companion been more irritating. Five times the old lady took off her boots to rearrange the grass that she used instead of stockings: and wherever there was the happy combination of running water and dwarf birch, she insisted upon making coffee. Naturally it was Aina who had to collect the creeping birch and make the fire. In the meantime old Inga settled down to another pipe and between the puffs told Aina what a good wife she would make for a boy like Lars.

Aina said nothing, but hung her head to hide her blushes. She trembled a little at the thought of complications. But Inga Partapuoli construed matters differently.

A mysteriously translucent twilight filled the sky when, after many hours, they reached the edge of the plateau. Below them, like an immense sheet of beaten metal, was a lake; to the left, with a background of greenish primrose, a great purple mountain streaked with numerous amber-coloured glaciers; and to the right, silhouetted against the golden sky, one of the herds of reindeer.

Both women stopped for a few moments; the one to gaze at the herd—so great a part of which belonged to her and her family—the other to send her thoughts beyond the mountain on the left along the trail which she thought *he* would take.

Then, silently, they descended the steep birch-clad escarp-

ment. Instinctively the two women picked up wood as they neared the kâta. It was a peat-covered, tent-shaped hut, which, obviously, had not been used as a dwelling for some considerable time.

Having dumped the wood and removed their heavy packs, they set about making the place like home. Aina climbed up the outside to remove the boards which covered the smoke-hole. Old Inga entered by the rickety door, and judging from her expression, was not pleased with what she saw. The floor was littered with mouldy twigs, shrivelled leaves and other rubbish. And when she raked away the litter even the bare soil appeared dank and unwholesome.

However, during the next hour the place was transformed. Having removed everything that contributed to squalor, they made a fire inside the ring of stones in the centre of the floor, fetched water from the lake, and set the coffee kettles on to boil. Then they cut great bundles of fresh green birch twigs with which to cover the floor. And it was surprising how many armfuls were necessary to make a thick, comfortable carpet for that erstwhile untidy hut.

Only reindeer skins were lacking, as the old lady remarked. However, quite good substitutes were produced from the bundles they had carried upon their backs, and before long both women were squatting on the floor enjoying a meal. Scintillating tongues of fire from the blazing birch logs danced upon the green leaves on the floor, upon the turned-up toes of their Lapp shoes, and upon their contented faces.

Suddenly the door opened to admit a young Lapp and his yellow dog. Both, apparently, were dead-tired. They were Lars Partapuoli and his boon companion, Lum. For more than a week they had been seeking reindeer. To-

night, as there were sufficient men with the herd, Lars could have an undisturbed night's rest.

With a cheery word he took his reindeer-skin rucksack from his back, took out his coffee kettle and set it on the fire. Then he joined the others on the floor and commenced a meal. Lum, meanwhile, sat patiently by, accepting with gratitude anything his master offered, but, like all Lapp dogs, never did he whine or beg.

From time to time other men and dogs entered. Some asked if they might sleep in the hut, others took it for granted that they would be allowed to do so. Even the Lapp policeman came. He was a Swede whose duty was to attend round-ups in order to settle disputes should they arise. In all his ten years' experience he had not seen the slightest sign of disagreement between the Lapps. The policeman could speak the language of these people; nevertheless, it seemed that the party lost something of its merry nature when he entered. Most of the Lapps stopped their joking, becoming suddenly serious and almost inarticulate. However, entertainment came from the numerous people who dropped in for a chat on their way to their own camping places.

First there was a party of women; the Nutti and Labba girls and their mothers. They knocked, entered and sat on the logs which bordered the pathway from the door to the fire. They were camping near the stockades, they said, but as others had gone ahead to do the work there was no need for them to hurry.

Old Inga again set her coffee kettle on the fire, although, seeing that there were now at least a dozen little copper coffee kettles all very much alike, it was a wonder she could recognise her own. The visitors knew that it was her intention to make coffee for them, so they said they had just drunk

coffee before coming to the kâta and would not take any more. Even when camping, Lapps are in no wise lacking in courtesy to their guests.

Another knock announced more callers. One wondered whether there could possibly be room for them on the overcrowded floor. After all had moved a little closer together, space was found for the new-comers—men and dogs, the owners of the reindeer which grazed on the mountains to the north. They had not seen their friends from the south for many weeks past.

Lars was now sitting next to Aina, perfectly content, although she was quite oblivious of his proximity. She listened intently to the conversation of the latest arrivals, hoping to hear Olla's name.

At last she was rewarded. Olla, it appeared, had been assigned the herding of the reindeer from the mountains near the Norwegian boundary. Because he was young and intelligent, and recognised as a clever herdsman, he had been specially chosen to work in this difficult region. He had not yet joined the big herd, but was expected during the evening.

The old Lapps then forgot even the presence of the policeman. They talked of the good old days when Lapps could wander where they liked with their reindeer without fear of fines or trials.

'It is so hard to keep them within the limits imposed,' grumbled old Per Nutti.

And Inga Partapuoli joined in, saying that life was much better in her young days when they moved about more instead of staying all summer in one camp and all winter in another.

'It is not natural,' she complained, 'for a Lapp to settle down for months at a time. Life was better then, when

we were always on the move. Why, I used to think nothing of going from Finland across Sweden to Norway and back again during the summer. And how many Lapp children to-day know anything of real Lapp life ?'

Then, as though surprised at her own outburst, she became suddenly silent. For some moments nothing could be heard but the crackling of the logs on the fire. Then Lum, the dog, sat up straight. His hair bristled and his eyes blazed. He was staring fixedly at Anders Omma's black dog who was surreptitiously eating a scrap from the floor near Lars Partapuoli's feet. With a sudden bound the yellow dog sprang at the black one. All the other dogs in the *kâta* jumped up and joined in. Barking, snarling, biting at each other, round and round they chased and scrambled. Over the people, through the fire they went. What a commotion there was ! At last peace was restored and the dogs had to be content with growling at each other from a distance, as their masters made them sit at their sides.

The policeman suggested that as it was ten o'clock and they were to leave at two in the morning it was time to sleep. Lars looked at his watch. 'It is five minutes slow,' he remarked. 'I put it right by the sun yesterday, and forgot to do so again to-day.'

So the visitors departed, and the seventeen who remained made for themselves beds out of the bundles they had carried upon their backs.

A short time later, Lady Moon, gazing in through the smoke-hole, saw a red glow of fire surrounded by stones, and radiating from it, like the rays of the sun, all with their feet to the fire, fifteen weary men and two tired Lapp women. She smiled a little at the tricks of Fate as she read the dreams of a man, a maid and an old Lapp woman.

The policeman was as good as his word. Well before two o'clock he made up the fire, filled his coffee kettle and went out to wash in the lake. This was a sign for the others to do likewise. Reluctantly, one by one, the men roused themselves, although Lars said he was certain that the herds would not reach the stockades until seven o'clock. When his coffee was ready he handed a cup to Aina, telling her, after she had drunk it, to go to sleep again for another hour or two.

'Lars knows more of the ways of the reindeer than does the policeman,' remarked old Inga, when all the men had gone. 'If he says they will get there at seven, you may be sure he is right.' So she threw some wood on to the fire, pulled her fur *pesk* round her shoulders and with a grunt or two once more settled down to sleep.

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The sun was high in the sky when at five o'clock they set off. Nevertheless, something of the Spirit of Morning still hovered over the mountains. It seemed to the two women that the world belonged to them alone, so still, silent and full of peaceful beauty it was.

But as soon as they had scaled the first ridge of hills they knew differently. Approaching from every direction were a hundred or more Lapps with bundles on their backs, lasso ropes across their shoulders and dogs at their heels. Some had walked all night; others, like Aina and her companion, had camped *en route*.

Towards seven o'clock, as they neared the stockades they saw a herd approaching from either side of the hill. Lining the routes to the two entrances, like soldiers at a coronation, and just as colourful, were Lapps. Suddenly, when the herds reached these guards of honour, came a sound like the

thundering of a mighty waterfall. The great discs of mottled brown rapidly became ribbons of rushing animals.

Aina ran to watch the entry of the nearest herd. The thundering of the hoofs was deafening, yet somehow its rhythm struck right at the heart and set all the pulses throbbing; throbbing with exultation. She felt lifted out of herself. Tears came to her eyes and a thrill passed through her body. What it was she could not understand; some sensation from past ages, perhaps, when the world was young and all living creatures were really free.

Instinctively she knew that it was communicated to her by the reindeer. They held their heads proudly, with a pride born of freedom, yet their dainty, disdainful steps took them swiftly where they were unwilling to go. Only their eyes told the truth. In them was something of fear, something of stubbornness.

Aina, bright-eyed, dainty, and dignified as the reindeer, silently watched the grand procession. Her pulses kept time with the rhythmical beating of thousands of hoofs.

At length, when they were all inside the stockades she turned to seek her own reindeer. The great thrill had ended, and with it had gone some of the light from the girl's eyes.

But a touch on the shoulder soon brought it back again. For a moment she and Olla stood face to face. They did not speak; words were not necessary, nor would they come. In that brief moment each read from the countenance of the other the answer to three months' secret pondering.

Then, quickly turning on his heel, the young man prepared his lasso rope for casting and the maiden wandered amongst the herd seeking calves whose ears were clipped to the pattern denoting her family's ownership. Aina seemed to be in a dream. She scarcely noticed the strange mixture

of sounds—grunting reindeer, crepitating hoofs, barking dogs and shouting Lapps.

For about half an hour after they had entered the stockades the herds continued to race round and round. When they became more resigned work began in earnest.

Four groups were to be made from the two, as animals from four different areas had mingled together.

Aina and her father now met and discussed work. Then the old man set about lassoing big animals and taking them to their mates in the other large enclosure. Aina caught calves by the leg and half dragged, half carried them to the same place.

Now and again father and daughter were obliged to seek help of one another. This was usually when the reindeer decided to sit down instead of being led, dragged or driven. And it sometimes happened that the two of them together could not make the creatures budge. Per Nutti pulled on the rope until his hands bled, and Aina's arms ached through pushing from the rear. One grand old fellow with branching antlers of great size absolutely refused to be moved by any means. He just sat tight and rolled his eyes derisively at his owners.

Aina looked round for help. All the other Lapps were working so hard that they seemed not to notice what others were doing. All except one, and he frequently glanced in Aina's direction. Seeing their distress, he left his own work and offered assistance. Even so, this stubborn animal was as much as the two men could manage.

Hour after hour they worked. Then Aina's father suggested stopping to make coffee.

'You might ask Olla to join us,' remarked the old man. 'He has been very good in helping us.'

Per Nutti was a good and experienced herdsman who

loved his reindeer. He had taken a great liking to the boy, for he recognised his skill with animals.

'That boy is not like some of the young Lapps of to-day,' he remarked to Aina. 'He doesn't get savage with the reindeer when they are obstinate.'

But the girl knew this already. She had noticed that instead of dragging his calves along the ground, as many did, he carried them all in his arms.

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They were thankful to leave the enclosures for a while and to crawl through the barricades into clean pure air. Many other Lapps were already drinking coffee and several called to Per Nutti to sit at their fires.

Much to Aina's disappointment he actually accepted Inga Partapuoli's invitation to join her and Lars. The girl only participated in the conversation when she was addressed. Unconsciously she compared the two young men who sat opposite to her. Actually they were alike in many respects, both being rather tall, blue-eyed, fair complexioned typical northern Lapps. Unlike many of their tribe, they were so race-proud that they disdained to wear any but true Lappish clothes and scorned to follow any but Lappish pursuits. Yet, in the eyes of the girl they were as different as night and day.

There was no time to waste. Two cups of coffee, a brief rest and they were back at their job.

Many hours' work had yet to be done. By the time the herds were in order all the men were black with dust and perspiration and many had bleeding hands. However, that was not the end. Each owner now studied his herd carefully in order to decide which calves to kill and which animals to castrate. Per Nutti and Olla helped one another

in this, as one man alone cannot do the work. The animals must be struck to the ground and held, usually by almost sitting on the head, while the herdsman bites with his teeth either through the testicles or through the spermatic ducts.

When they were ready to kill the calves Aina had to be found, for not only had meat to be considered, but the skin as well. Aina needed a new fur park for the winter and her father wanted her to choose the skins for herself. For like most men, he did not trust his judgment where feminine apparel was concerned.

Although Aina liked a pretty coat, she hated to see the calves killed. The knife, struck straight at the heart, reduced suffering to a minimum. Nevertheless, the girl left the enclosures before her father began his unpleasant task.

She soon forgot the matter when Olla came along and offered to help hold the cows while she milked them. The two wandered through the herd once more; this time the boy lassoing the cows and the girl milking them into a birchwood bowl. She had to milk many cows before her bowl was full, as no reindeer gives more than a cupful of milk and many give less. The delicious rich milk is slightly sweet in taste and regarded as a great luxury. Small wonder, then, that as soon as milking was finished they went to make coffee again, this time for the sole pleasure of enjoying the milk.

However, a noise from the enclosure, announcing that the auction was about to commence, caused them to hurry over their second cups. Unbranded calves that were not running with their branded mothers were to be sold. For the first time in the day the policeman became a prominent figure. He stood by while an old Lapp brought along the one and only calf to be auctioned.

For a while no one made a bid. They all sat back waiting,

knowing that whoever bought the calf must kill it, as it is forbidden by law to brand it and let it run with the herd.

At length someone offered 'Akta grone'—one shilling. This was followed by other bids each a shilling higher than the previous one, until 'Veeshta grone'—five shillings—was called and the auction ended. The money was paid to the policeman, who would pay it into the Lapp Fund.

People now seemed to be taking things easily. Olla and Aina, knowing that the small herds of animals that had wandered from the far-distant mountains would be the first to leave, went back to the fire. Inga Partapuoli and Lars were not there now. All the same, the young couple talked only of very mundane matters. Yet they were happy to be together and remained there until it was time for the herd with which Olla's reindeer ran to set out for their rightful feeding grounds.

As they rose, Olla remarked quietly that perhaps at the next 'Raktid'—round-up—Aina's reindeer would be running with his.

'But we must talk about it after the autumn trek, when we get to our winter quarters,' he concluded, hurrying away to hide his blushes.

Aina hastened to the stockades lest she should miss something of the thrill which always accompanies the departure of a large herd. Women, girls and men who were not to go with the reindeer were taking up their positions on either side of the route they were to take. For about half a mile this guard of honour stretched. Herdsmen and dogs remained inside until the signal was given. Then, raising their nostrils as though they smelt freedom, prancing with excitement, the grunting reindeer poured out. With great bounds they thundered their way down the hillside.

With eyes more lambent than those of any reindeer Aina

watched them go, and with them, Olla. At last he had become a speck upon the distant mountain and no more reindeer were to be seen. Yet still she watched. Yes, it was as usual. In their excitement at the first moments of regained freedom the animals forgot everything except the joy of wide-open spaces. For about half an hour they had followed the leader. Then, little by little the herd had broken up. Cows sought calves from which they had become separated, calves sought their mothers and with grunts of distress returned to the stockades. Cunning old reindeer wandered off in little groups while the herdsmen and dogs were trying to collect the cows again.

Aina stood dreaming of her lover out there all night on the bare stones, maybe snatching an hour or two of sleep, maybe having none at all, and this after a hard day's work.

A voice behind her brought her from her reverie. It was old Inga asking her if she were ready to take the trail once more. So she shouldered her pack and went off, hoping to get a good sleep. On the morrow she was to help find the straying animals. Early in the morning a ring would be made round the herd. This would gradually be made smaller until all the reindeer were together again.

BRITISH MUSIC.
A RETROSPECT OF HALF A CENTURY.

BY A. E. KEETON.

THERE must still be a few musicians, scattered about the world, with memories of Anton Rubinstein's colossal series of lecture-recitals on pianoforte music given throughout the length and breadth of two continents. One young English listener at least, first hearing him in Moscow, never forgot his opening sentence : ' There is an island, a two thousand-mile journey across Europe. I take that island as my starting-point in the story of pianoforte literature ; for I hold England to be its birthplace.' Forthwith he played ' The Carman's Whistle ' and others of the lovely early music primitives by Tudor composers for the virginals and harpsichord. Later he took Purcell, and dealt with the nocturnes of John Field, whom he summed up as ' the direct precursor of the soul, the spirit, the very genius of all modern pianoforte music—Chopin.'

Some years after this experience, talking with another of last century's musical giants, Hans Richter, I quoted Rubinstein. Richter commented that if the English had any good composers, ancient or modern, precious little was ever heard of them. He himself, he added, had only met with one worth mention—this was Arthur Sullivan, for whom he professed such genuine admiration that if on occasion some ultra-serious Teuton approached him with a ponderously weighted score, Richter felt he could do nothing better than advise careful examination of, say, the overture to ' Iolanthe ' as a dynamic example of how much can be perfectly expressed

with a surprising minimum of means. Wagner and Sullivan—a musical antipodes; yet Richter, perhaps the greatest exponent Wagner has known, could say with conviction of Sullivan's genre of light opera, that in its own typical and national calibre and style it was as good as anything of Wagner. Richter was also of opinion that England possessed many first-rate vocalists and choruses of unrivalled excellence, but that our orchestras (in his day we had very few) were only very so-so.

When finally I settled in London these stray pronouncements from a Rubinstein and a Richter made me open my ears with keen attention. I found a bewildering welter of music-making of all sorts, good, bad and indifferent; but the only concerts I could discover where English names abounded, and which undoubtedly could attract crowded audiences and could (I was assured) bring huge fortunes to their chief promoters into the bargain, were certain gargantuan orgies, the Queen's Hall and Albert Hall Ballad Concerts. These affairs struck me, though, as but sad and sorry travesties of that delicious Tudor heritage championed and beloved by Rubinstein. Evidently I had taken a wrong turning. When I tried again, the scene was once more the Queen's Hall, but this time uncrowded. I was all agog, though, for now surely I was to find my Mecca and perhaps lead thither that doubting Thomas, Hans Richter, since I was invited to nothing less than first hearings of whole programmes of works by young British composers introduced under the obviously generous and kindly auspices of the Ernest Palmer Patron's Fund. Alas, there could be no potential fortunes here, whether ill or well begotten. Just as I have never forgotten my juvenile elation listening to Rubinstein in Moscow, even so I still retain a sense of deep depression and melancholy engendered by these singularly

dismal and abortive performances. The participants seemed merely bent upon celebrating their own obsequies with all due speed. R.I.P.¹

I look back upon my divings and delvings—my many perambulations up and down England—round about, and in and out of London concert-halls and opera-house. When was it exactly that at long last, definitely, I caught the strains of a contemporary music with—as in the Tudor days—a genuine heart-beat of its own, expressed in a diversity of strongly articulate individualities? I know it was the baton of an enthusiastic Yorkshire Squire, the late Sir Alexander Bosvile Macdonald-of-the-Isles, that first made me aware of Elgar.² I was already on the trail of Hubert Parry, of Charles Stanford, of Ernest Walker, Ethel Smyth, of Alexander Mackenzie, of Delius, Joseph Holbrooke, Hamish McCunn, of Benjamin Dale, Percy Grainger, Frederick Nicholls, Richard Walthew—Granville Bantock—Gustave Holst of—of whom shall I say? There was a regular spate, a small galaxy of these people. Their every work was not, one knows, a superlative masterpiece, but a good percentage of it had sincere, vital quality, and Elgar at least has proved a gem of first magnitude to shine in the music sceptre of any nation. Also, it is by hearing his music well interpreted

¹ The 'Ballad Concerts' died and disappeared long ago, but the 'popular ballad' can obviously still attract a certain type of listener, and seems to have found a permanent home with the 'B.B.C.' The Patron's Fund continues active, but advisedly travails and brings forth its efforts in collegiate privacy.

² During the latter decades of last century, Sir Alexander Bosvile (then plain Mr. Alexander Bosvile) ran what were known as the 'Bridlington Musical Festivals,' for which from year to year he got together and trained his own choir and orchestra and himself rehearsed and conducted the whole proceedings, and as soon as one festival was over, started training chorus and orchestra for the following year. Many English works and a number of young British artists got a first hearing at these festivals.

that a composer surely may best perceive its defects and remove them.

Time has elapsed since I had any opportunity of hearing these composers. I have, though, retained an abiding impression of rare poetic fancy and sensitive workmanship in the pianoforte-pieces and songs signed Frederick Nicholls ; of finely wrought, beautifully balanced chamber music, as well as being characteristic vocal work by Ernest Walker. A gem amongst our song literature is Walker's setting of W. Henley's 'Bluebells from the Clearings.' Or there is Ethel Smyth's Opera 'The Wreckers,' strong and vigorous in its tragi-humorous portrayal of Cornish history and psychology.

Very little of this music perhaps, even now, can have passed the manuscript stage, and comparatively little of it to this day can often have had the well-rehearsed, adequate public hearing which it is honestly worth. The status of British music was in 1900, in fact, very much where Rubinstein had found Russian composers a full half-century earlier ; and for years he had devoted the entire proceeds of those famous lecture-recitals to the task of making his Russians—since become of world repute—prophets also in their own country. Moreover, he lived long enough to see his dreams come true. Somewhere about 1905 I discovered—through a chance meeting with the late William Elkin—another and very important English musical milestone. In 1903 (the identical year, by the way, that the Ernest Palmer Patron's Fund also came into existence) Elkin had risked his all upon a venture then unique in England. He set up as a publisher solely of modern British music. He combined rare vision with genial, practical accomplishment. He gathered round him a nucleus of composers, the bulk of them of a younger generation than Elgar, Parry, Stanford

and the rest. Elkin became no millionaire. But his venture easily justified itself. It could even survive the tragic 1914-18 setback to all good publishing work. He afforded fine opportunities to these younger ones, and incidentally backed quite a number of winners, amongst them Cyril Scott and Roger Quilter. And his inceptive idea caught on. He set the pace to other publishers, who have followed in his path.¹ And yet, could Hans Richter return to earth, he might still ask: 'Your British composer—I yet do not hear much of him?' It is nevertheless no longer a question of lengthy delving and diving. Richter could at once be introduced to the B.B.C., which behaves quite well to British music. He could also, if he glanced through the 'Provincial News' of our foremost music journals, note quite a fairish amount of British names, and he might in more general chronicles even discover them from time to time in the musical activities of Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Vienna, Salzburg, etc. Another very fertile source, which fortunately can embrace in every sense our musical and communal life, is the wonderful network of competitive festivals firmly established, not only throughout the British Isles, but also alert and alive in the Dominions. The competitive festivals held in the provinces of Western Canada, for example, are splendid users of British music. This may well be, to some extent, a pleasing and abiding witness to the grand pioneer work carried out some years ago by Dr. E. H. Fellowes and his choirs in Canada and the U.S.A. The educative and artistic value of the competitive festival movement can hardly be too highly appraised. For that very reason, an impartial and most enthusiastic listener may

¹ William Elkin also ranked as a leading authority upon musical copyright, and used his knowledge to the great benefit of performers and composers as well as of publishers.

perhaps venture a word of very modest criticism and caution. Cliques and clichés are always dangers to be strenuously avoided. Here and there to an attentive onlooker there can creep in a suggestion of somewhat too close adherence to what may be termed the 'Royal College,' 'South Kensington' or 'Folk Song' schools. Every serious musician readily places Vaughan Williams in the first rank of our musical life. But as I have tried to show, he is not the only bird in our music bush.

Another criticism may be offered in the sphere of solo concert-giving. If, for instance, vocalists do happen to include an 'English group' in a programme, why is it almost always placed as an afterthought at the very end, when the satiated critics, whose bounden duty it is to spread the good and the bad tidings, have departed, and the audience is also trickling away? Much the same criticism, but in even greater degree, can apply to the pianists.

This brief survey is an attempt to sum up the chances and changes of British music, its merits and destiny spread over some fifty years' personal observation. I present it, as seen, heard and felt merely by myself. My perspective and outlook may be quite wrong. I write explicitly open to correction. The composers I have had chiefly in mind have been of pre-war origin. There is also a conspicuous post-war group—such as William Walton, Constant Lambert, Benjamin Britten, Arthur Bliss, Edmund Rubbra, Victor Hely-Hutchinson, Arnold Bax, Roger Coke . . . To one whose own lifetime has well exceeded the septuagenarian allotted span, and whose earliest musical impressions were imbibed (and retained, too, very tenderly down the years) by hearing the harmonic and melodic transparencies of Mendelssohn and Gounod, or the glorious tenor of Sims Reeves trolling forth Balfe's setting of 'Come into the garden, Maud,' it has

been a tortuous journey to arrive amongst the moderns. Sixty years or so of music travel implies much more complex going—say—than the progressions from a sedan chair to a monoplane. Perhaps I could never be entirely at my ease in the monoplane ; more especially since I have had no more scientific musical guides than my own fairly erratic, peripatetic, personal tastes. My earliest stepping-stones onward from Mendelssohn and Balfe, I found amongst the Russians, Dargomîshki, Moussorgski, Borodine ; or the Norwegian, Grieg, or a Brahms, a Debussy, a Ravel, a Dukas—and then back to Russia with Scriabine and Stravinski—and here, finally, once more in England with the distinctive vigour and resonant dissonances absolutely characteristic of Cyril Scott—and again the fine music miniatures of the much younger man, Victor Hely-Hutchinson of Hogarthian wit and humour. The approach of my own older and now quickly passing generation can easily be diffident, hesitant.

My personal experience has taught me, though, that the nearer one gets to the moderns—the more familiar with their accent and idiom—the more vibrant and significant strikes their note and their message. I have indeed the feeling that these composers are inevitably as much part and parcel of the expanding life of to-day and to-morrow as are Imperial Airways or the B.B.C.

Just as I had finished this slight sketch I happened upon K. von Stutterheim's little book, *Those English*. Herr von Stutterheim devotes a considerable portion of a chapter on English Civilisation to our music. He regards our modern musical output not only on the executive, but also on the creative side, as a great renaissance. He remarks that in the Tudor-Stuart period England was the leading country in music ; that she bids fair to lead again—in some respects is already leading—and that, on an altogether higher grade than

is being achieved anywhere else at present. Or again quite recently, the British Council has offered a musical scholarship of £250 per annum tenable for three years to enable foreign music students to complete their education in London. This is something much upon the lines of the famous Prix de Rome of Paris. A writer in *The Times* remarks : ' This is the first effort on anything like the same scale undertaken in this country. It should prove invaluable in building up in foreign countries an expert appreciation of British music.'

Perhaps though, finally one of the healthiest and most significant portents of the spread of a taste for British music, is the fact that one can pick up a popular weekly and find, in a serial ' thriller ' by Anthony Berkeley running through its pages, a little party of friends in a country drawing-room discussing the relative merits of an Arnold Bax or a Vaughan Williams' gramophone record. This is indeed bringing modern British music right into the home circle.

THE BLAEBERRY HOLLOW.

BY S. N. MEARNS.

CAMERON, I knew, was a teller of tales ; the old tales of Badenoch, of the clansmen and of their forerunners the Picts.

We had tramped for two hours, but so far the conversation had been of ordinary things, sheep grazing, deer forests and fishing ; the story I hoped for had not materialised.

Arriving at Loch Pityoulish, which lies at the foot of the mountain called Craigowrie, we paused to rest ; and sat for a while in silence gazing at the rugged spur of rock on our left.

Cameron broke the silence. He pointed with the stem of his pipe towards the western side of the loch and said in his soft highland voice :

‘Do you see yon hollow?’

‘Yes!’ I said ; ‘that one without trees, do you mean?’

‘Aye! the one without trees. Do you not think it is strange that there are no trees in it?’

‘Well,’ I replied, ‘now that you mention it : I notice there are trees on three sides, but none in the hollow itself ; possibly there is something in the soil which does not suit them.’

‘Aye,’ he said ; ‘something in the soil. If you would care to hear, I’ll tell you the story.’

He began, very deliberately, to fill his pipe while I settled down to await the tale. The sun shone on the face of the hill, making the bell heather show up in vivid purple patches. A light breeze ruffled the quiet waters of the loch and

whispered gently among the leaves of the birches where we sat. A chaffinch warbled his short song near, and the plaintive call of a curlew came over the water, melancholy and muted.

Cameron had his pipe lighted now and began :

‘ You know that we are on the borders of Rothiemurchus, the Great Plain of the Pines. This land, like most other land in the North, has had many owners at different times and, each time there was a change, men died.

‘ Long ago the forest was held by the Clan Shaw who lived in their rough stone, turf-thatched houses near where the present village stands.

‘ One dark night during a very severe winter, they were surprised and attacked by a band of the Clan Cumming, who had, for long, been their enemies. The swiftness of the attack found the Shaws unprepared and, so, unable to offer any great resistance. It became a massacre ; most of the men and several women were killed, the remainder fled into the forest where many died of exposure. Rothiemurchus had changed hands.

‘ Among the few who did survive that night of terror were an old woman, Mhairi a nurse, and her charge Ian, the son of the chieftain.

‘ How she lived and kept the child alive as well, during the succeeding days, no one knows, but she did and made her way south to Perth, where a branch of the Clan Shaw lived.

‘ After a few years, when the boy had outgrown his need of her, Mhairi came back to her native soil. The Cummings permitted her to settle near them and, as they regarded her as a witch, allowed her to come and go about her simple domestic tasks in peace.

‘ Twenty years passed, the boy had grown to strong man-

hood. His very black hair and dusky complexion had earned for him the name of Ian Dhu or Ian the Black.

'Over and over again Mhairi had told him the story of that night of blood among the dark pines; he brooded over the wrongs of his people and the death of his father; a silent bitter man nursing a hate and a lust for vengeance.

'When he was about twenty-six he gathered together forty young men, his cousins and friends whose hatred of the Clan Cumming was only slightly less than his own. With this reckless band he set out from Perthshire to reopen the twenty-five-year-old feud.

Early one morning, when the heads of the flowering grasses were silvered and bent with dew and mist clung to the tops of the pines like a torn veil, Ian Dhu and his followers arrived at the rude hut of the old nurse.

Bidding his men remain hidden in the forest, Ian cautiously approached the door and knocked. Presently he heard Mhairi get up and come to the door.

"Who," she asked, "would be knocking at an old woman's door at such an hour?"

"It is myself that's in it; Ian Dhu," he said.

"How would I be knowing if it is Ian Dhu or no?" said Mhairi. "Put you your mouth to the crack and say 'the word.'"

'So Ian Dhu put his lips to the crack in the door and whispered "the word" which she had taught him when he was a boy for just such a time as this.

'When she heard that word she opened the door and let him enter; she went to the fireplace, raked over the smouldering peat and threw on a handful of resinous chips to form a blaze. In the light of the flaming wood she looked at him out of her shrewd old eyes.

"You are grown into a fine man, my Ian, and like your

father was ; twenty-five years this back end it is since he died with his dirk in his hand across his own hearthstone. God's curse on all the Cummings ! ”

“ Yes,” he said, “ twenty-five years of waiting, Mhairi ; but the day of reckoning has come. With me I have forty men, all Shaws, and we are going to give the Cummings a sup out of their own pot. I must be on my way ; it grows lighter and will be dangerous for us in the forest. I called to see you in passing, my heart, before I take what I have waited for so long.”

‘ He moved to the door, his hand was on the latch when Mhairi’s voice stopped him ; it came quietly but with great insistence.

“ Wait, laddie ! With my own eyes I saw you grip the hilt of your father’s dirk when you were only a few days old ; although my years are many my memory is good, I have forgotten nothing and I, too, have hated. There is a better way. What good will it do to burn a few hovels and turn your men loose among the women ? That would be a poor revenge. Hark to me ! The menfolk of the Cumming are on a foray toward Forres : this day they are expected home. Come with me, Ian Dhu, you and your men ; I will show you the place of vengeance.”

‘ She wrapped her plaid round her shoulders and with Ian Dhu at her heels stepped out of the hut into the mist-laden morning, and set out at a rapid walk in a northeasterly direction.

‘ The men who had lain in the wood fell in behind their chief one at a time with the silence and bloodthirsty intentness of hunting weasels.

‘ Thus they followed the old woman for two miles till they came to the open country round this loch ; where Mhairi stopped and said :

"You are in time, Ian Dhu, they are not yet come ; take your men to the north end of the loch and hide there. I will climb this hill here and signal to you when they come and which side of the water they take."

Mhairi started to climb the rocky hill and Ian took his men to where she had pointed ; and there they hid in the undergrowth to await the signal.

The men of Clan Cumming were very near ; driving stolen herds and carrying booty acquired on their foray on the low-lying counties further north. They had had a hard time, the farmers of Moray had shown fight and much hardihood in resisting the pillage of their herds and goods and had even pursued the robbers to the borders of Badenoch, so that the Cummings had to press on all night.

Now, being near home, tired and hungry, handicapped by several wounded and driving footsore beasts, they had straggled out into a long line.

They chose the west side of the loch as the going was easier and, having no fear of enemies on their own land, had no scouts to warn them of their danger, but walked straight into the trap set by Mhairi and Ian Dhu.

The first few men were killed before they had time to realise what was happening ; the remainder were picked off in the same way as they came up in threes and fours. One or two tried to fight but were quickly overpowered, their bodies being dragged into the hollow to be out of sight of those following, till all were accounted for. The sole survivor was a young lad who had been knocked down but only stunned.

The Shaws' lust for vengeance was satisfied and the taste was as bitter as leaves of bog myrtle in their mouths.

The boy recovered and was dragged before Ian Dhu,

where he stood awaiting his fate with what defiance he could muster ; but he was young and very frightened.

' Ian Dhu looked from the bodies of his slain enemies to the boy before him and asked :

" Who are you, boy ? "

" I am Seumas," said the lad, " fourth son of Alistair Mor of Rothiemurchus ; my father and brothers are there." His chin quivered and he pointed over his shoulder at the dead.

' Ian Dhu gazed at the boy and wondered if he should be killed ; he bore the hated name, but he was very young—and his vengeance was complete. The boy should live and take a message to his people.

' Ian felt suddenly very weary, he sat down on a rock and spoke to the lad.

" See, boy, I shall spare your life ; the debt is paid. You will go to Rothiemurchus and you will tell what you have seen this day. Say also that Ian Dhu, son of ' the Shaw ' who died at the hands of your people twenty-five years ago, has taken his revenge for that night's work. ' The Shaw ' will sleep in peace from this day. Go, boy."

' The boy went.

' Ian Dhu and his men marched into the hills and scattered ; no trace of them was ever found.

' The boy arrived at the little village and sobbed out his tale. The women covered their heads with their plaids and began the keening for the dead, and set out for the hollow to bury their loved ones who were now no more.

' When they arrived and Seumas' mother saw her slain husband and her three stalwart sons her grief and rage were terrible to see. After the burial when the women knelt to sing their lament, she alone stood, dry-eyed, and cursed the place.

“Accursed hollow, where lies the best of our clan, ye shall remain for all time open to the sky. No trees shall grow nor flower of the heather; no birds shall build their nests and the beasts of the field shall shun ye and in winter the snow shall lie deep!”

Cameron's voice sank into silence, he had a far-away look in his eyes, back in imagination in those far-off, turbulent days and seeing, as I did, a mental picture of that tragic woman after burying all that was dear to her.

The silence lasted for several minutes; there seemed to be no comment necessary. At last Cameron spoke again, very softly as if not to disturb the sleep of the long-dead warriors whose bones lay in that sunlit hollow.

‘I cannot make an attempt even to explain such things, but, as you see, there are neither trees nor heather growing there, only blaeberry: the blaeberry was the badge of the Cummings.’

MIRANDY.

BY LADY ADAMS.

MIRANDY was the coloured cook in the quiet hotel near the University, where we stayed for years in Los Angeles. Her cooking was like a culled pusson's dream of heaven. When we gave a dinner-party, Mirandy and I used to discuss it for days beforehand, fir de fud an' de flavourin' were vital interests to Mirandy.

I played the piano every morning immediately after breakfast; I kept my sitting-room door open, Mirandy kept her kitchen door ajar, and I always finished with some spirituals, and what she called 'de melodies dat my soul loves.'

And then Mirandy fell ill. She sent in a quite beautiful party dinner for us one evening, and I managed to put my head into her shining kitchen on my way upstairs to our own quarters, and to whisper:

'Mirandy—your chicken was a marvel,' and she said:

'Listen, La-aa-dy, did ye awhl like mah canta-loopy ice cream?'

Next morning, she struggled to get to her work in good time for breakfast, but by lunch-time she was 'awhl in, an' jist *hid* ti go ho-ame.' And when little old Mirandy jist *hid* to do something—well, there was no more to be said.

Next day, Edward, the black butler, told me she was very ill, and when I asked him what we could do, or give, or offer, he said:

'Lady—'Randy won't be with us awhl fur long—Lady—cud ye go ti see 'er?'

So I telephoned to ask if I might go, and ten minutes later was on my way with some gifts, including two avocado pears, because Black Edward said 'Randy liked dem, dey was awful grand, an' dey was nourishin'.

I thought I would never reach Mirandy ; there seemed no reason why the street car and I should not go on travelling for ever. Mirandy came frum de fur end uv de culled quarter, and went back by street car every night—and Mirandy always looked contented.

I thought I had been given the wrong address ; the house was large, and in excellent repair ; her neighbours seemed the nicest kind of coloured folk ; her granddaughter opened the door, and took me upstairs ; the furniture was good, old and shining. Beulah told me that de house wuz Gran'ma's ; but dat dere wuz a turrible mor'gage, an' dat wuz why Gran'ma did yer washin'. Now I realized why Mirandy had diffidently asked if she might do our washing—awhl but de stiffy shurts, an' de cawhlers ; for the mortgage.

She was lying in a huge four-poster, the sheets were dazzling, and she looked just like a tiny tortoise that had crept into a bed and was too scared to come out. Her little wizened hands held the sheet, and her face lit up at seeing me and the avocados and the roses ; but she was too tired to speak.

'Sing, please, Lady,' she whispered, so I crooned 'Way down,' and 'Poor Black Joe,' and from that I drifted into 'There is a Happy Land,' and from hymns to the Psalms of David ; I stayed with David, and blessed my Scotch upbringing that enabled me to sing through most of the verses of many psalms. I do not know how old Mirandy was ; but I did not know that anybody could look so aged and be alive.

She died that night, holding a rose, and two days later I

got an invitation requesting the honour of my company at the funeral of Miranda Jessica, widow of Manasseh Jameson.

The funeral parlour was full when I got there—and I was half an hour too early. The wreaths, the bouquets, the crosses, the crowns, filled every corner—and it was January. Mirandy was evidently a person of importance; more; the coloured quarter loved her. She was lying in her coffin in front of the altar, in her Sunday dress; a white shawl was over her shoulders, her little old hands were full of roses, her little black head was resting on a cushion of roses; all pure white. But the Mirandy we knew and loved was gone. 'The artists of the funeral parlour' had been at work; her sunken cheeks had been filled out, she was smiling, there was colour on her lips and on her cheeks, her hair had been oiled, her nails were shining. It was incredible.

There was a beautiful service by a coloured clergyman, and we sang 'Our loved Mrs. Manasseh Jameson's favourite hymns': 'A Few More Years,' and 'There Is A Happy Land.'

We were all asked to 'defile in front of Mrs. Manasseh Jameson,' but I stayed where I was, remembering Mirandy in her little hug-me-tight, and her contented black face. This smiling lady was new to me.

Then a curtain was drawn in front of the casket, and the relatives, all clad in an almost French depth of crêpe, were asked to 'take a fond farewell,' while we others sang 'Till We Meet Again.'

I had meant to go home after the service, but Mirandy's sons and daughters had other plans for me. At the eldest daughter's request, a coal-black man came up to me, and invited me to ride in his car. He told me, before I could open my astonished mouth, that he had been a taxi-driver in San Diego, had saved enough to buy, first a taxi, then a

Ford, then a Chevrolet, and lastly a hardly used Hupp, of which he was very proud. He said that though he had bought it as an owner-driver speculation, still, fur two weeks he wuz drivin' his friends fur pleasure like, an' if I wud jine in, we would hev a wunnerful fest drive ti the cem-e-tairy. So I jined in. I was shoved, for I could not slip in, into the back seat between two huge negresses, one in purple, the other in scarlet—and when I say 'scarlet,' I mean it. The driver-owner packed the rest of the car with grinning, happy coloured folk, and at the end, two crisp-haired children materialised, and were squeezed on top. 'The X marks the débutante,' I murmured to myself, as I remembered *Punch's* picture, and sank out of sight.

Then came an amazing drive. In the coloured quarter, funerals take precedence; funerals may do so all over the world, for all I know, but few cortèges take such advantage of their rights as we did. Dear Mirandy set off in her flower-laden hearse about two minutes before her friends. It was obviously felt that she should have her chance; she shot down the street, and turned hard and fast to the left; when the Hupp started, which it did with hoots from the Hupp, and cheers from most of the occupants, it turned equally fast to the right. Everything and everybody made way for us; the coloured policemen stood with bared heads as we whirled by, every car trumpeting; my colleagues on the back seat sat with their folded arms on their great chests, except when they unfolded them to wave to friends, or, sometimes, just to the world at large. Finally, we got to the coloured folks' last resting-place. Mirandy was there first, her two drivers looking eerily excited. None of us showed our annoyance, but our driver-owner said thet eftern awhl, 'Randy hed hed a gud stert. Nobody asked my opinion, which was that Mirandy would have loathed it all.

Then came another service ; the coloured minister, who had done his own racing, was doo at a wedding ; but he was dignified and earnest, and though he conducted it with dispatch, still it was sweet and gracious. My scarlet friend then told me it was time to go, for Mirandy, who had rushed through the streets in a quite gorgeous casket, was going to be slipped out of it and buried in the shell underneath. The top casket was hired ; so were the French-looking clothes and veils of the chief mourners. Everything hired had to be back at the funeral parlours by two o'clock. The owner of the Hupp came along to gather his load. He asked me to join them ; they were goin' drivin' some, an' were goin' ti hev a li'l fun'ral lunch somewheres, an' wud be hannered ef I wud jine dem. But I had had far more than enough ; I was startled, cold, miserable, and rather upset. Some people would enjoy their own funeral ; Mirandy would have hated hers. So I débutanted with the Hupp to the cemetery gates, and then took a tram home ; over five miles it was, and the going was slow. But the tram was more like a funeral than the Hupp, and I had time to collect myself, and to think of our little Mirandy as she used to be.

Los Angeles.

ADEN PICNIC.

BY HEATHER HAMILTON.

I.

'TEN rupees stand between you and death.' The lanky Somali boy pronounced this momentous utterance with suitable solemnity as he brought in the early morning tea. A staggering statement to be faced with, even at high noon. In the early hours of the morning, when just awakened from dreamless sleep, it takes on the significance of Fate. Death : what death ? Obviously one is expected to die shortly, unless—what was it ?—ten rupees could come to the rescue. But have we got ten rupees ? Do we want them to stand between us and—death ? At this hour we are not sure ; perhaps, after all, death would be a happy release—at least it would obviate the necessity of having to get up.

But we must pull ourselves together, and, keeping a stiff upper lip, demand an explanation of this cryptic statement. It appears that the sea is rough and dangerous, and full of sharks, and boats are easily overturned . . . Yes, yes, all this we know : but we come of an intrepid seafaring race, and have faced these dangers before. What, then, the significance of this long preamble ? Let us get to the point. But Achmed is not to be hurried. Follows a soul-stirring description of wrecks at sea : and are we not aware that this very day we are setting out on an expedition, and that there are to be *mem-sahibs* in the party, and yet we have no life-saving apparatus on board the boat ? Through a glass darkly, we yet begin to see glimmers of light. Can it be that for ten rupees Achmed is going to provide us with a

life-belt apiece, or a rocket-gun? or maybe a small motor lifeboat? Obviously, we are not in a fit state to cope with matters of life and death, and to avoid further disgrace by asking frivolous questions, we meekly hand over the money and hope for the best, remarking mildly, *en passant*, that 'it' (should it have been 'they'?) must be ready by noon, as we are timed to depart at one o'clock.

The rest of the morning is spent gathering together what small amount of stores we need, and collecting the odds and ends required for a short week-end in camp. After an early lunch, we join the rest of the party at the Club.

The dhow is at her moorings, a picture of elegance and grace, her scarlet and gold flag blowing bravely in the breeze, her green and white paint gleaming. The crew are on board, stowing the kit. On catching sight of us the 'skipper' jumps lightly into a dug-out canoe, and paddles ashore. Two by two we embark, sitting uneasily in the bottom of this unstable craft, our knees drawn up to our chins, gripping the sides to try and keep our balance, and looking as unconcerned as it is possible to look when enveloped in an aroma of generations of dead fish.

Miraculously, we find ourselves alongside and still right way up; gingerly we stand erect and, determined to show our mettle, leap (as we hope) nimbly on board, nearly submerging the 'skipper' as, now that we are leaving it, we light-heartedly use the canoe as a spring-board. Regaining our dignity, we move for'ard to inspect a sinister rectangular object which had already focussed our attention from the shore. Without a doubt, it is Achmed's life-saving apparatus. A monstrous raft, six feet by three, taking up the entire deck-space forward, a wooden framework over which is stretched a piece of canvas, the whole supported by empty petrol-tins. In spite of its unwieldiness, the 'skipper' is

entranced, and hastens to explain how the *mem-sahibs* are to sit in the centre, while their menfolk propel it. We find it difficult to share his enthusiasm, conjuring up a picture of valiant manhood hanging round its sides, concealing with brave jests the fact that their nether limbs are being nibbled by hungry sharks in the depths below.

The anchor is up. The long yard is laboriously hoisted and the triangular sail shakes out. We are under way. Slowly we nose our way past half a dozen small boats at their moorings, slip by the stern of one of H.M. ships (rather nearer than we intended, but only we know that, and we refuse to catch the skipper's reproachful eye)—out into the fairway. Away from the lee of the land, the wind blows strongly, and like a thing alive, the boat strains forward. The sky is cloudless, and almost colourless: the sea is an unbelievable blue, foam-flecked. The heat and the glare produce a pleasant soporific effect, and disposing of ourselves as best we may, we tilt our topees over our noses and prepare to contemplate the infinite. The crew squat for'ard, in the shadow of the sail, Hussein the taciturn, Mahomed the talkative, brawny sailormen both, born to the sea: with close-cropped hair and broad, pleasant faces and shining coffee-coloured skins, they wear only a dirty once-upon-a-time white singlet, and a 'futih' or short kilt. It is too hot to talk, even Mahomed is silent, and Abdullah, the youngest member of the crew, is somnolent. He is a bright-eyed, intelligent lad still in his teens, with a quick smile, showing a flash of perfect teeth. He wears a turban, and his clothes are almost clean: though he comes of fisher-stock, he is town-reared, and obviously 'a bit of a lad,' but a good seaman none the less. The 'skipper' is at the helm. Standing a good four feet ten inches in his bare feet, with bandy legs and a wizened face and little bright boot-button eyes,

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one is tempted to think that here, at last, is the Missing Link. His seamanship is unerring and instinctive, and his mind is that of a fish. He knows what the fish are doing, and why. 'To-day we will not catch fish,' he says, 'because they are sad. But to-morrow they will be happy, and we will catch many small ones. Next week, we will get big fish. On Wednesday, the sardines will be in, the big fish will follow them. On Thursday we will catch many big fish.' And lo and behold, it is so.

We make for the point of Little Aden, and, rounding it, we pass the crew's native village of Baraika, a cluster of miserable huts on the seashore, where nets are spread to dry, and canoes drawn up on the beach, but there are no signs of life at this blazing noontide hour when wise men take their ease, and only 'mad dogs and Englishmen' are abroad. Beyond is a desolate, eerie landscape, with a beauty all its own. One feels the moon must be like this: jagged spikes of slate-blue mountains with rivers of pale yellow sand surging round their feet. Relentless, barren, without vegetation or shade, swooning in the midday heat. One could not be surprised to see great grey lizards emerge from the creaming surf, or a leather-winged pterodactyl swoop down from a crag, even a troop of H. G. Wells's 'Moon Men' would not be out of place, for this is surely a different world from the kindly earth we know. It is age-old beyond our comprehension, and terrifying in its starkness. One would not like to wander there alone, and it is with relief one sees the little shining white dome of a saint's tomb in a fold in the sands: lonely, it accentuates the desolation around, but it serves to shake one out of one's nightmare imaginings. Here, at least, is evidence of puny man, as we know and understand him!

We are brought roughly back to reality by Sinbad, the

Sea-going Sweeper, who up to this point we had hardly noticed, beyond conferring his title (which was to prove singularly inapt) upon him. He had been enlisted by Achmed to look after the sanitary arrangements of the camp (as in India, Sweepers are a class apart). We stipulated that he must have had experience of the sea, so that we should have no trouble with him on the voyage : but alas ! for human frailty, poor Sinbad is overcome with excessively noisy sea-sickness. He is curled up like a dog, a picture of abject misery. His coal-black negro face (for he is of slave stock) is the colour of grey ashes and there is no doubt that he has already reached the stage when death would be infinitely acceptable. Poor Sinbad ! we are sorry for him, but we wish he could be less noisy in his suffering.

Thoroughly aroused from our midday lethargy, we begin to sit up and take notice. Excitedly, someone points out a huge sting-ray flapping near by, and someone else thinks they see the triangular fin of a shark break surface for a moment. Coming up astern is a dhow of about our own size : she does this trip daily, carrying water to the villages on Little Aden. The 'skipper' hails her, and we begin a neck-and-neck race which lasts until we reach our destination. The excitement is tense, our honour is at stake, and with a sigh of relief we drop anchor a good five minutes before she does. The sun is low on the horizon as we round the last bluff and come under the lee of the land, sailing gently into calm sunset water. Canoes push out from the shore as the anchor goes overboard. From the mud and grass hovels of the village the inhabitants pour out to have a look at the strange arrivals. Children predominate, they come running from all directions, fearful lest they should be missing anything. Little sisters carrying babies on their hips, as their mothers do ; big brothers hand-in-hand

with toddlers—fingers in mouths, tummies well forward, they stand speechless, regarding us with huge dark eyes. Some of the girl children are surprisingly attractive, clad in shapeless nightdress garments, brightly coloured ; with ear-rings and nose-rings and rows of tinkling glass bangles. All look healthy and well formed, in spite of in-breeding (the fisher-folk do not intermarry with the Bedouin). Perhaps their superior physique is due in part to their all-fish diet. A few of the grown women have remnants of their childish good looks, but mostly they are hags—shapeless bundles draped in dirty black, with little attempt at veiling ; only if you catch their glance, they will hurriedly draw the headcloth over their faces and turn away.

Clutching as many belongings as we can, and leaving the rest to the crew to bring along, we set off down the beach to our camp-site. Like the Pied Piper we are followed by all the children. We break the ice by handing out old tennis balls, especially brought for this purpose—a brain-wave on somebody's part. In a moment of abandon, two of us join hands and start to skip along the shore ; immediately the children follow suit, with much giggling and chatter, and the hopping of dozens of little bare feet makes a queer 'frou-frou' noise on the hard sand. Having decided exactly where we are going to camp, it is no easy matter to shake off our following, and we have to call the crew to our aid, who successfully 'shoo' them away with what we take to be horrible threats delivered in terrifying roars. Gathering their ragged garments (if any) around them, they take to their heels and run—but only as far as a near-by hillock, where they take up a strong position from which they can watch our every movement : only some of the bigger boys remain below, playing football with our tennis balls.

Our 'camp' consists of one small tent for the ladies ; in

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it there is just room—and only just—for three camp-beds, one across the end, the other two close up against it with their heads towards the opening ; there is no space to walk between the beds, and toilets have to be performed outside. The men put up their beds in the open, a little farther inland. All this has to be done hurriedly, before the sun sets and leaves us in darkness. When all is settled for the night, we can sit back and take our ease with a much-needed 'sundowner.' Behind us, rising steeply from sea-level, are the unfriendly crags of Little Aden ; in front, the sands gleam white in the half-light, sweeping round a long bay, as far as the eye can reach, to the rocks of Ras Imran. The sky is still a luminous pale green low down in the west, though overhead it is already night and the velvet blue-black depths are reflected in the sea below. The dhow is lying at anchor where we can see her graceful lines in silhouette, 'with few, but with how splendid stars' appearing one by one in the darkening sky beyond her.

A little way up the steep sandy slope behind us the boys have lit a fire, and the evening meal is being prepared. We sniff the air hungrily. Food plays an important part in camp life, and the simpler it is the better—and how one does eat ! Sprawling in a circle round a petrolmax lamp we consume vast quantities of bully-beef stew and sand, washed down with beer, and more sand. Well nourished, inevitably we burst into song, shattering the peace with horrid noise, and the echoes go rollicking off into the hills.

Before turning in we take a stroll along the beach and climb the rocky headland that rises between us and the village where we landed. Although it is not later than half-past nine, there is not a light to be seen, not a sound to be heard, not a movement. We are disappointed in the night-life of Little Aden, and turn back towards the camp.

The crew, with the Somali boys, are squatting round the glowing embers of the fire, a circle of silhouettes casting distorted shadows on the sand. Sea and shore are merged in blackness, except where the ripples break in phosphorescence along the beach.

The ladies retire to the shelter of their tent, and the men to their row of beds, looking for all the world like a dormitory for small boys, ridiculously incomplete without its confining walls. Last good nights are shouted and lamps extinguished, and infinite quiet descends. The only sound is the swish and gurgle of the incoming tide, and what lullaby could be more satisfying?

Our last waking memory is of a line of camels in the black distance, striding silently out of the darkness into a deeper darkness beyond: but we are too sleepy to wonder where they are going, or from whence they came. They are 'the stuff which dreams are made on' and we pass into blissful unconsciousness.

Like the last, our first impression is also of camels. In the grey light of dawn, grunting and complaining as their masters goad them along, they do not appear quite so idyllic. They are miserable, mangy brutes, and very smelly, and they have woken us up with their vulgar babbings. Nevertheless, once we have shaken off the sense of injury we are grateful to the camels for having roused us. For this is not a time of day to be missed: there is almost a nip in the air, which is most exhilarating. The new-born sun is kindly, giving youth and freshness to a haggard land. Presently it will become a ball of fire, sapping vitality, but as yet it is a friendly thing, spreading a genial warmth, dispersing blue shadows and discovering hazy outlines. Waiting for breakfast, it is delightful to contemplate the long peaceful day's fishing which lies ahead. No need to worry about that

arch-villain, Time, no hurrying back for meals (we will cook the fish we catch). To-day will be our own. Whatever has gone before, or is to come, we do not care. With true Oriental fatalism we are determined upon our philosophy :

*' Unborn to-morrow and dead yesterday,
Why fret about them, if to-day be sweet ? '*

All too soon we will have to pack up and return to civilisation, a little tired and infinitely dirty, but with a satisfying sense of fulfilment and refreshment. We have had a glorious time. Other expeditions have been more enterprising, more exciting, have lasted longer : but we were not ambitious, and we have done what we set out to do. We have been peaceful and unhurried and care-free. There has been no hitch, no snag—and we shall yet get home, insha 'Allah, without having recourse to Achmed's raft.

II.

Ten o'clock of a fine Sunday morning ; zero hour. We pile ourselves and the lunch into two cars, and take the road. Winding through Hejuf, down the Ma'alla straight out on to the Isthmus ; the R.A.F. Station at Khormaksar flashes by, and we speed along the level road to Sheikh Othman, salt marshes on either hand enveloping us in their rank, stale odour. A belt of greenery ahead proclaims the oasis, and taking a left fork of the road we find ourselves in the main street of Sheikh Othman. It is Bedlam. We steer a zig-zag course, playing a tune on the motor-horn, dodging pedestrians and camel-carts, nosing our way through flocks of sheep, swerving round stray donkeys and goats ; pulling up short to avoid moon-struck Bedouin, gaping wide-eyed—for to these wild-looking, half-clothed tribesmen from the

hills, with rifles slung over their shoulders, white men—and more especially white women—are still curiosities. The more sophisticated town-bred Arabs and Somalis pass by without a glance; a khaki-clad policeman in a red tarbush waves an ineffective truncheon, and we cut across the bows of a heavily laden camel, which refuses to alter its pace, and sways majestically on its way, treating us with more scorn than we really deserve.

Along the right-hand side of the wide road are booths and cafés, humanity surging round them in all the noisy picturesque colourful filth of an Eastern bazaar. To the left is an open space, dotted with sad-looking trees in whose inadequate shade are tethered donkeys and mules, and kneeling camels, munching placidly in groups—and everywhere there are goats of every hue, and yet more goats. Here the caravans come in and unload—from Lahej and the hills beyond, and the distant mountains of the Yemen, and the far borders of the Protectorate. Slowly and unhurriedly they have wound their way through the mountainous country, following routes that were old in Bible times and that have not changed since. Nowadays one can follow most of the main routes by car, gaining perhaps in speed, but not in comfort, and still the camel and the donkey reign supreme.

Farther on, we come to where long strips of dyed material—gay reds and blues and yellows—are laid out in the sun to dry. Everything is covered in fine dust, and the smells never become monotonous in their infinite variety. It is a gay scene, and a good-natured easy-going crowd, and after all we are in no hurry. Contenting ourselves with second gear, we thread our way through, and presently, taking a sharp left-hand turn, find ourselves off the main thoroughfare, on the road to Hiswa. 'Road' is perhaps only a com-

parative term ; in England it would be called a track, and considered quite unfit for cars. The pot-holes are sometimes large, sometimes small ; the ruts are sometimes wide, sometimes narrow ; the motion is irregular and interesting. It is impossible to tell what the next hazard will be, and driving requires more than usual care and concentration. A sand-drift must be spotted ahead and taken at speed, or we may find our wheels churning impotently and awake to the horrid realisation that we are stuck—or a sickening thud on the springs will draw our attention to a pot-hole that we didn't see in time. Screams from the back seats will indicate that our passengers have been in imminent danger of going through the roof and are ungratefully demanding that we give them new topees.

For a while the road is uninteresting, a desert track bordered by sand and low scrub, but ahead we can see trees, and presently, rounding a bend, we come upon the little green oasis of Hiswa. A cluster of graceful 'toddy' palms, almost a 'wood,' unbelievable blue depths of shade, trees, real trees ! It is impossible to realise the delight of this meagre patch of greenery unless you have lived in a land devoid of it. In the midst of a brazen landscape, it is luxury indeed to feast one's eyes on the soft tones of green—so, for a while, we rest here, loth to leave the twisted 'toddies' and their feathery top-knots, grateful to their kindly shadows.

Emerging from the trees to higher ground, we get a wide view. Northward stretches the desert, rolling away to the foot-hills of the Yemen ranges, to the south is the sea, with the Barren Rocks beyond. It is a curiously one-dimensional scene, laid on with a clean brush in flat tones of blue. The sea is a deeper shade than the sky, Aden itself a half-tone between the two, but there is no depth, no

shadows to give it substance or to lend perspective. It is a Paul Henry landscape, lovely but lifeless, fascinating to the eye by its very lack of detail, its bold clear lines and washes of pure colour.

There is not much traffic. We pass a small caravan, four camels nose-to-tail, a small boy walking in front, mother and father humped on their respective beasts. A solitary camel trotting fast shies badly as we come up behind and nearly topples his rider into the sand. A native taxi, piled high with humanity, passengers clinging to every part of it, swerves off the road for us to pass, and disappears, hooting madly, and at break-neck speed, raising a wall of dust behind it. Some miles before we come to it, we can see before us what looks like a sign-post, and as we approach, we find our eyes have not deceived us—it is a sign-post! A lonely civilised thing, pointing desperately to left and right in an arid wilderness. Being sticklers for such things, we flip out our traffic indicator, and take the right fork, turning north-west, our backs towards Aden now. The other track would have led us to the salt works; the dazzling pyramids of salt stand out against the blue background of Little Aden, they dance and glitter in the shimmering air and their brilliance hurts the eyes, intensified, as it is, by mirage. The marshes are multiplied a score of times, producing the effect of a chain of salt-lagoons—at times it seems the road must cut through them, but as one approaches, the illusion goes. We can indulge in a burst of speed here, reaching at least thirty miles per hour, as the surface is of baked mud and at intervals quite smooth. Crossing the level plain the sea is once more before us, and as we near the beach, we can see our boat lying at anchor; she has been sailed round here the night before, to be in readiness for our arrival.

The road sweeps on right-handed, but we leave it here,

and turn towards Little Aden and the sea, going as far along the shore as we deem it wise on the soft sand. The crew have seen us and, headed by the shrivelled monkey who is our 'skipper,' come running towards the cars. They are not alone. Accompanying them are all the able-bodied inhabitants, male, female and infant, of the fishing village which lies hidden behind a rocky headland that juts into the sea, a hundred yards or so ahead. No doubt to these simple isolated people we present the same thrill as a travelling circus to an English village. Motor-cars are by no means an everyday occurrence, and to see them moving backwards causes a perceptible tremor through the crowd of children who are watching our manœuvres wide-eyed. Even to ourselves, our general appearance is slightly exotic. Open-necked shirts and shorts—the women of the party in long trousers—surmounted by topees and dark glasses, add little to one's personal allurements, and to these children of nature, clothed simply in rags, or not at all, we must seem quite horrible, and not a little ridiculous. We prove an irresistible attraction, however, and are escorted to the water's edge by the entire gathering. Here we embark in a large dug-out canoe and are paddled slowly out to the dhow. The long yard is already hoisted, the sail reefed up to it with strips of dried grass, so that it needs only a jerk on the sheet to free it, and we are under way.

A stiff following wind lends us wings, so that we seem to skim over the surface of the smooth sea rather than plough through it. There is an exhilarating sense of speed and lightness that only a sailing boat can give ; one does not get it in an aeroplane, which is a soulless thing. In the air one is superior and detached and perhaps a little godlike, but in a boat one is alive, earth-bound, but free, and the boat is exultingly—and sometimes exasperatingly—alive too. We

fill our lungs, and sing 'Speed bonnie boat like a bird on the wing,' in rousing chorus, and caught up by our enthusiasm, the crew give voice to a rhythmic chant—a never-ending ballad centred round the exploits of a gentleman named Bin Dor—and it, too, has a lilt of the sea in it.

Our destination lies four or five miles out to sea; a curious yellow bump on the horizon, like a haystack that has lost its way. It is the island, Hollow Island, that we are bound for. The result of some monstrous volcanic upheaval, Hollow Island, as we come nearer, looks more like a coco-nut than a haystack—a gigantic coco-nut hurled into the sea by some playful god. One can almost hear the shout of Olympian laughter that went up at the splash it must have made. The side we approach is smooth and steep and honey-coloured, but we lower the sail and paddle gently round to the entrance of the cave. Here the aspect changes. From being inanimate, Hollow Island becomes alive; a titanic sea-monster with yawning jaws ready to snap down upon us as, unsuspecting midgets, we slip into its very maw. The line of shadow falls clear-cut across the entrance, and coming out of dazzling sunlight, it is as if we had shut a door behind us. At first it is impossible to see anything in the thick darkness, but slowly our eyes become accustomed, and we see a vaulted roof above us, falling gradually to a passage a few feet high which passes into the very heart of the island, losing itself in deep purple shadows that we would not care to investigate alone, for fear of what might lurk within. The ceiling is hung with thousands upon thousands of bats, and sitting on a ledge is an ancient sea-bird which rises at our approach and flaps by us with a melancholy cry. Beneath us is the sea, 'the dragon-green, the luminous, the dark, the serpent-haunted'; it is mirror-clear, and we can see every pebble at the bottom of its

twelve or fourteen fathoms, and every fish that swims. The eerie, slightly uneasy feeling of having intruded where we are not wanted soon disappears with the excitement of catching fish. Fairy-tale fish! We pull them out with almost every cast. All sizes, shapes and colours, and each one different from the last. Sometimes one can hardly believe that they are true—electric blues and greens, brilliant reds and yellows, in symmetrical stripes and spots and circles, such as no human artist could conceive in his wildest imaginings. It becomes a game to mark down a fish, dangling the bait temptingly before his nose. There are cunning big fellows, smoky-blue, that hug the bottom and are difficult to catch; higher up are the silly little tiddlers that nibble nervously at the dainty morsel, darting away in a flash of light as some bigger one shoulders them out of the way and swallows the bait with a snap in a swirl of green water. It is fascinating beyond description, this strange under-sea world that one can watch as clearly as if one was in a diving-bell, and even when the fish go off the take—which they do at intervals for ten minutes or so at a time—one's interest never slackens, and only the pangs of hunger make one draw in the lines, and call a truce for lunch.

Half an hour's interval, and we are at it again. But enthusiasm is noticeably on the wane, even the fish appear less eager. Some of us unashamedly give way to that after-lunch feeling, and closing the eyes, snooze contentedly. Conversation lapses, and lines dangle slackly. The sun, creeping westward, has discovered our retreat and is encroaching on the shadows, turning the cool green water to molten metal, flashing his searchlight into the hidden recesses of this secret place—making of it a sweltering oven where we gasp for breath in the heavy used-up air, and sweat gathers on the brow. It is time to move, and we are as

eager to quit this inferno as we were enthusiastic to enter, when it was all blue-green depths and shadows. But first the catch must be counted ; a hundred, a hundred and fifty, two hundred—the figures mount fabulously, and we sit back well content with the day's slaughter, and give the order to up-anchor. We slide quickly back into the reality of sea and wind and open sky. The breeze has freshened since the morning, whipping the sea into short steep waves through which the boat plunges and staggers uncomfortably. Occasionally we ship one green, and the 'skipper,' squatting in the bows, glares round at the helmsman like an angry monkey, freezing the laughter on our lips with his 'We are not amused' expression. With a strong head-wind against us, we have to make wide tacks, so that the homeward journey takes twice as long as the outward. After half an hour of uneasy motion, we become conscious that all is not quite well with some members of the party. There is a certain listlessness, a noticeable lack of *joie de vivre*—until first one, and then another, hastily subsides, stretching out on the benches running down each side of the open boat. What humour is there in sea-sickness, toothache, and falling downstairs that calls forth unseemly mirth even in the most humane ? Is it a 'there-but-for-the-Grace-of-God' feeling that finds expression in unchristian jests and jibes ? We cannot say ; but we, who enjoy the rough and tumble of a rollicking sea, are brutally unsympathetic. The crew put us to shame with their tender solicitude for the victims, round whom they rig a sail-shelter, whether to guard them from the scorching sun or the horrible sight of their compatriots sucking oranges, we are not quite sure.

At last, after an hour or more of open sea, we come under the lee of the land, and our buffetings cease. The corpses revive, taking new lease of life, and even joining in

our noisy and not very tuneful choruses. We make our landfall in good order, and as we come into shallow waters the 'skipper' (surprisingly, to those who have not seen this manœuvre before) springs overboard, claspings the anchor to his bosom, swims leisurely under water, and eventually places it firmly behind a convenient rock. Returning to the boat, he shakes himself dry like a dog, and resumes command.

Packing up and getting ashore is a slow business that gives the villagers ample time to muster in full strength for our reception. We are an even less inspiring sight than before, being now both dirty and dishevelled, but evidently we have lost none of our fatal fascination. We plough stiffly through the soft sand back to the cars, leaving the crew in charge of the boat. They will have a 'gala' dinner on Little Aden to-night, and sail home in the early hours of the morning. Already the shadows are lengthening, colours deepening, and the sky is a blaze of glory. Night descends swiftly in these latitudes, and we still have far to go. Scrambling quickly into the cars, we wave a friendly 'au revoir' to the fisher-folk and take the long desert road. Our backs to the sunset and the evening star, we make across the level plain, towards the darkening horizon.

*'Void now, and tenebrous the gray sands curve before me. . . .
Eastward I turn, and homeward, alone remembering—
Day that I loved, day that I loved, the Night is here!'*

RANDOM MUSINGS OF A SEMI-VEGETARIAN.

*Though I do not hold with bigots, who swear by joints and gigots,
Yet, were I forced to visit butchers' shops
To choose the raw materials for my fare, I'd turn to cereals
For my sustenance, or even turnip tops.*

*I confess as I grow older that I turn a colder shoulder
To the lure of beef, of mutton, or of veal,
And in the wide variety of vegetarian diet, I
Now find a far more intimate appeal.*

*On a regimen leguminous my brain becomes more luminous ;
By the sages of the past I am unawed,
And resolutely scorning Pythagoras's warning¹
I batten upon beans when they are broad.*

*Green artichokes are splendid and most cordially commended
By epicures, who delicately dine,
But the 'choke that seems beholden to Jerusalem the Golden
Is erroneously linked with Palestine.*

*Bees may frequent my bonnet, but I neither scorn the sonnet
Nor the carrot, though it doesn't charm my tongue :
Its qualities arsenical may at times be hygienical,
But I like it best when it is very young.*

¹ 'Abstain from beans.'

*The parsnip's most nutritious, but to say that it's delicious
Is to me a glaring inexactitude :
Though it might have proved enthusing to Nebuchadnezzar,
 musing
As he munched his wholesome unaccustomed food.*

*The spinach in its succulence does not conduce to truculence,
 But leaves a healing influence in its track ;
And the French, so realistic and seldom euphemistic,
 Have called it le balai de l'estomac.*

*Plums, fresh or from the bottle, gently titillate my throttle ;
 Ripe strawberries in the pottle are a dream ;
And I'd gladly write a slogan for the raspberry or logan
 Au naturel or glorified by cream.*

*The pear for railway travelling is beyond the reach of cavilling,
 It satisfies both thirst and appetite ;
While the common railway sandwich is mostly of a brand which
 Is void of all gustatory delight.*

*When given a raw banana I am moved to say mañana
 And defer the eating till I feel inclined ;
But it is a first-rate mixer and provides a fine elixir
 For salads of the tutti frutti kind.*

*But a truce to idle rhyming, for the beatific chiming
 Of the dinner-bell falls sweetly on my ear ;
And I hasten to the staying of my hunger and allaying
 Of my thirst with flagons of the best of beer.*

C. L. GRAVES.

THE CORAL SNAKES.

BY 'TANJONG.'

AMONG the many thousand islands in the Eastern Pacific there is one of exceptional beauty, and in case you protest that this description applies to the majority, I will tell you why this one is exceptional.

In shape it is just like the new moon in the summer sky, a very curly, crescent moon with one horn topped by three feathery palms. A coral bar stretching across to the other horn serves to break the force of the Pacific rollers—when there are rollers—and outside this bar the water is the deep blue of delphiniums, while inside it is just the colour you will see in a piece of broken glass bottle when you look at it edgewise. Inside this lagoon there is a stretch of sand, pearly white at the water's edge, grading through pale yellow and deep gold to an iridescent purple under the high part of the island where palms and flowering trees surround a single slab of white coral, standing upright like a kitchen-table turned on end.

Once a passing warship banged away half a dozen shells at this natural target and so shattered the nerves of the island birds that they have never quite forgotten it, and to this day a small fall of rock will cause them to rise in a screaming, rainbow-hued cloud.

Should you ever come to this island you will probably recognise it by my description, but you must never try to land there, for it is the home of the coral snakes. They are there in hundreds of thousands, on the sands, under the

rocks, in the trees, everywhere. They and the nervous birds are the only inhabitants, unless you count the fat, lazy sharks that bask outside the reef and the vultures who visit the island occasionally to see if there is anything exciting in the way of lunch.

If you are foolish enough to venture ashore, the coral snakes will probably bite you and then you will go to sleep and never wake up again. Not that they are vicious; they are merely curious to see the effect of their bite on a new subject.

They are also curious to know just what is going on in the outside world and have waited many years for someone to come and tell them. Sometimes when the blue sea turns to greeny-grey-black and the big rollers try to leap over the coral bar and sweep away the three palms, things come ashore, but only interesting to the vultures.

One day, far out beyond the bar, there appeared a speck which came closer and closer, until it materialised into a small boat with a man in it. When he reached the coral bar he found he could neither pass through nor pull the boat over, so he got out on the reef, stripped off all his clothes except a leather belt with a sheath knife and swam for the beach. He came hand over hand, tossing up little sprays of water which flashed in the sunlight like scattered gems, until he reached the sand, and there he sat down and gazed at the horizon.

The little coral snakes were tremendously excited. Here, at last, was someone who could tell them about the outside world, so they all rustled down the beach and crowded round him, but the man appeared not to notice them and remained gazing out to sea.

One of the little snakes crawled over his ankle and another squirmed on to his bare knee. The man glanced down and

said 'Hallo, you funny little beggars !' and once more turned his eyes to the sea.

At last they became impatient and nipped his toes to attract his attention ; the man merely sighed, stretched himself out on the sand and went to sleep.

He lay there so quiet and still that a vulture sitting on the rocks decided that his attitude was interesting and worth investigation, so he spread his wings and flopped on the sand beside him, but the coral snakes were jealous for their newly found treasure and one of them struck the vulture in the face. The bird squawked once with surprise and collapsed into a ragged heap.

Presently a second vulture swooped down, only to share the fate of his stricken brother. Then came a third, sailing high up, a speck in the blue vault. He saw the outstretched man and dropped like a stone from the sky, but as he touched the sand two snakes sprang and struck together. The bird wheeled, hit the face of the rock and came to earth like a crashed 'plane.

After that there were no more intruders, and the man slept.

He slept for a whole week and the little coral snakes sat round him and waited for what they knew would happen.

One morning the man stirred, sat up and rubbed his eyes. He looked at the coral bar and the three palms, then he looked down at the sand and saw the little coral snakes sitting round him. 'Hallo !' he said. 'So you're still here. What are you waiting for ?'

'We wait for you to speak, O man,' answered the snakes. (Somehow he was not a bit surprised to hear them talking.)

'We want you to tell us all about the big world from whence you came and how you came and why ?'

'Very well,' said the man. 'But I must first find some water—I am thirsty.'

As he rose to his feet the big leather belt with the sheath knife slipped from him and fell on the sand among a little heap of crooked white sticks which lay exactly on the spot where he had slept. He saw the little rill of water which splashed down the rocks and went to it with all the little snakes rustling behind him. When he had drunk his fill he gathered an armful of fruit and sat on the sand to eat it: the little snakes watched him patiently until he had finished, then they all cried together: 'Now, tell us your story.'

'I wish I had my pipe,' said the man, but as he had left it in his clothes on the reef it was no use wishing, so he started to tell the coral snakes this story.

'It is just six years ago since I left England. Life had treated me shabbily, for in one year I lost first my money, then my good name and then my wife, so that I had nothing left but my little daughter. I realised that my chances were finished as far as England was concerned, so leaving my little girl with a relative, I sailed South hoping to make a quick fortune and return to fetch her. After five years of up-and-down luck I threw in my lot with three men who owned a small trading vessel in the islands. One day we were caught in a typhoon and before we could run for shelter the boat was hurled on a reef and smashed. I was struck on the head by a falling spar and thrown into the sea. I recovered my senses on the beach of a small island very much like this; I was bruised and stiff from my rough treatment by the seas and I slept until next day in the shelter of the trees. I was ravenously hungry when I awoke and realised that I'd better get a quick knowledge of the island's resources. There was plenty of fruit, but it was poor rations

for a hungry man, so with the hope of finding some shell-fish I returned to the reef.

'The tide was ebbing and in the swirl of the water I saw, on the extreme point of the reef, something which I made out to be the fore-part of a vessel wedged firmly in the rocks. At first I thought it might be the hulk of our schooner, but as it was still awash I could not be certain. At any rate I was determined to investigate it in the hope of finding something useful, and when the whole reef was uncovered by the receding tide, I scrambled over the rocks.

'It was not our schooner, but an old wreck which had evidently been there for some months.

'The sides were slippery with weed, and when I at last managed to reach the deck it seemed as if I had wasted my effort, for the seas had swept her bare. Looking aft I saw the roof of a deck-house, still half-submerged, and waiting until the water had fallen I crawled down the slippery deck. On my way I picked up an iron bar, and with this I smashed open the door and found myself in the skipper's cabin. Everything was waterlogged and covered with green slime, there was apparently nothing worth taking, but as I turned to leave I noticed a closed locker and with my iron bar I prised it open. It was full of charts and papers, all so rotten with sea-water that they fell to pieces when I threw them out. Then under all this rubbish I found a wooden box. It was locked, but my iron bar quickly knocked it apart, revealing a mass of shining, green stones.

'I recognised them at once as emeralds of fine size and quality and I wondered how such a treasure came to be left behind when the crew escaped, if escape they did.

'As I sat on the floor turning over the jewels, the incoming tide trickling through the planks of the deck-house warned me that it was time to leave ; so, tying the stones in my shirt

and taking the iron bar, I returned to the beach. In the excitement of my find I had forgotten the main object of my visit to the rocks until my stomach began to grumble, and then I went down to the pools and collected shell-fish.

'The prospect of raw shell-fish was not over-attractive, so with my iron bar and a flint I managed to ignite a heap of palm fibre. The fire gave me an idea. I piled driftwood on it, and when it was blazing I threw on an armful of damp seaweed which raised a column of smoke that could have been seen for miles. For a whole week I kept up this smoke signal without any success, and then one morning I saw a ship standing in to the island. She saw my signal and sent a boat ashore and an hour later I was once more a free man.

'She was a fair-sized trading schooner carrying a crew of eight men; a set of devil-may-care ruffians, but I was only too glad to get away from the island and I bargained with the skipper for a passage to the nearest port where I could get a ship to England.

'At first they took little interest in me, but one day I foolishly let them get a glimpse of my treasure, and the trouble started. The skipper, who was as big a scoundrel as any of them, suggested that I should share my find with them. Of course I refused. I pointed out that I was willing to pay a good price for my passage but they had no claim on my property, and when he hinted that, as far as the world knew, neither I nor my treasure still existed, I understood that he would not stop at murder to possess the stones. I also realised that the only safe place for them was on my person, so I stole a big leather belt with pouches, filled it with the stones and wore it under my shirt. I also took a sheath knife so that I should not be altogether unarmed if they attacked me. My chief concern was that my treasure should ultimately reach my little girl, and with that end in view I

wrote her name and address and a request to the finder, whoever he might be, to deliver the contents of the belt to her. This I sewed in a piece of oil-skin and placed in one of the pouches.

'Although the crew made no open attack on me, accidents began to happen with unpleasant frequency. A heavy block was dropped from aloft and struck the deck between my feet, and on another occasion I barely escaped the crashing swing of the boom when the mainsail was gybed without warning. At last I determined to get away on the first opportunity. I had noticed that the ship's dinghy was always atow, and seizing a moment when the men were all forward, I slid down the painter into the boat. Two minutes later I had cut the rope and was some hundreds of yards astern of the ship, which was moving before a steady breeze. I had no food, only a small bottle of water, and was quite out of the ordinary track of shipping, but I considered that my chances of life were better adrift than with that crew of rascals.

'All that night I drifted about and the following morning I sighted this island. The rest of the story you know.'

The man yawned and stretched himself. 'There,' said he, pointing to the belt on the sand, 'is my treasure, and here am I as far away from home as ever. And I do wish I had my pipe.'

'And what are you going to do now?' asked the little coral snakes.

'Watch for another ship to take me home,' he replied.

'No, you cannot go!' cried the snakes.

'Cannot go, eh?' echoed the man. 'We'll see about that,' and he jumped up with the intention of swimming out to the boat which he hoped would still be on the coral bar, but when he reached down to pick up the belt, his

fingers seemed to pass clean through and he realised what had happened to him. He went back to the snakes and sat down.

'You are right,' he said sadly. 'I understand now why I can never leave this island, but if a ship should come this way, what is to prevent me from hailing it and asking the skipper to deliver the belt to the address in England?'

'They would not see you, they could not hear you,' said the snakes.

'Yes, that's true,' replied the man. 'But if some honest seaman should come ashore, he might find the belt and carry out my wishes without the asking.'

'No one who puts foot on this island can ever go away again,' said the snakes. 'We see to that.'

'Let us make a bargain,' suggested the man. 'If someone comes ashore and we know by his actions that he is an honest man, let him take the belt; but if we judge him to be a rogue, then you shall deal with him.'

'Agreed, agreed!' cried all the little coral snakes.

A year passed, another was on the wane and the belt still lay on the sand, but one afternoon as the man was watching the sea rippling in the sunshine, a boat rigged with a leg-o'-mutton sail appeared round the corner of the island. It zigzagged up and down as if completely out of control, struck heavily on the reef and by great luck drifted through the only channel to the calm waters of the lagoon.

Here one of the two occupants lowered the sail while the other punted the boat to the sand. Then they hauled her clear of the water to examine the damage caused by the coral. It amounted to a couple of burst planks, but the two sailors were evidently not in the mood to work on the repairs; instead, they pulled out a spirit keg and a pannikin which they filled and swigged turn and turn about.

Soon the hot sun and the spirit began to take effect and they commenced to curse the heat and the boat and the reef. Then they cursed each other with many quaint oaths and would have fought, only they were too tipsy to hit each other. So they tried to dance until one of them fell and, pulling his mate with him, rolled on the sand and slept where they lay.

Then the man and the little snakes came down the beach to inspect their visitors. They looked like a pair of Calibans stranded by the tide and snored so loudly that even the vultures were afraid to come near them. The little snakes crawled over their faces and tickled their noses, but they only snored the louder, so the man and the little snakes left them alone and returned to the rocks to watch.

When the first rays of morning sunshine slanted across the island one of the seamen awoke. He was very thirsty and the first thing he did was to tilt the spirit keg over his mouth, but there was not a drop left. Then he espied the little stream running over the rocks, and picking up the pannikin he lumbered over the beach to where it formed a pool. He drank and drank as if his thirst was unquenchable, then he dipped his frowzy head into the pool, and feeling refreshed he started back to his companion. As he stumbled down the sand his toe struck against some object. It was a sheath knife and in pulling at it he uncovered a leather belt.

The knife was rusted and useless and the belt rotted with the sea-water. He was about to fling it away when a brilliant green stone fell at his feet. He picked it up and examined it, then he hastily tore open one of the pouches and gave a shout of surprise. It awoke his companion, who sat up, blinking his eyes. 'What yer found, Jim?' he asked.

'Nothing,' replied the other, hastily stuffing the belt inside his jacket. 'Only an old sheath knife.'

'Then what are yer howlin' about?' said the first.

'Hurt my foot on a rock.'

'Serves yer right, walking about disturbing people at this time of day. What yer after?'

'Water.'

'Water!' echoed the other, scrambling to his feet. 'My gosh! Where is it?'

'Over there by the rocks,' said Jim. 'Ere catch,' and he tossed the pannikin to his mate, who hurried off to cool his parched mouth. Jim watched him until he had disappeared over the crest of the beach; then he hid behind a rock and once more opened the belt.

As each pouch revealed its glittering treasure he grunted with delight and swore viciously when the rusted fasteners resisted his clumsy fingers.

A hairy fist reached over his shoulder, snatching the belt from his hand, and his mate's voice snarled: 'This is yer nothing, is it? Thought yer'd cheat yer partner, eh?'

'I didn't know what was in it,' lied Jim.

'Well, yer know now,' said the other, 'and we're goin' fifty-fifty in this, see?' He started to stuff the emeralds back into the pouches.

'Here, what are you doing?' asked Jim. 'Let's divide 'em here and now.'

'No, we don't,' replied his mate, buckling on the belt. 'Tide'll be high in half an hour, and if we don't want to stick for ever on this rotten island we've got to mend the boat and be off, so get a move on and we'll divide when we get back to the ship.'

Jim grumbled fiercely as he followed his mate to the beach, and started to help with the damaged boat. The

other, grasping the keel under the forefoot, told him to slip a stretcher underneath as he heaved the boat up, but Jim, instead of doing what he was told, seized the heavy bar of wood and brought it down with all his force on the other's bent head, killing him instantly.

Next moment he was down on his knees wrenching at the belt buckle, but even as he dragged it from the dead body, something sharp struck him on the hand, then another on the face and another and another. He sprang up with a yell of terror, tearing at the little snakes which were clinging to every bare inch of skin, his knees gave way suddenly and he fell writhing across his murdered mate.

An hour later a coroner's jury of vultures were holding an autopsy and this time the little coral snakes did not interfere; they liked their island to be neat and tidy.

And next day the belt lay on the sand and the man looked at it and sighed because it seemed that no honest man would come to the island.

Six months later a beautiful steam yacht anchored off the island and from her side came a boat rowed by four sailors. They brought her straight through the gap in the reef and beached her without as much as a graze on her paint and out of it stepped two men. One of them was the captain of the yacht, the other, who was quite a young man, was the owner. 'By jove!' he exclaimed. 'This is the prettiest island of the lot.'

'Pretty enough,' replied the captain, 'but it has an ugly reputation. It is supposed to be inhabited by ghosts and snakes. No one ever comes here.'

'I'm not afraid of ghosts or snakes,' laughed the young man, 'and it looks to me as if there is someone here. See that boat?'

'That's strange,' said the captain. 'We haven't sighted a vessel for two days and there's no inhabited island within a hundred miles. Suppose we investigate.'

They walked along the beach to the stranded boat and saw the bleached skeletons lying in a jumbled heap under its bows. 'There seems to have been some dirty work,' remarked the captain, pointing to the crushed skull. 'I wonder how the other fellow died.'

Then the young man saw the belt, and was stooping to pick it up when a snake scuttled away from under it. 'Be careful,' warned the captain. 'Those little beggars are deadly poisonous.' He kicked the belt with his foot to dislodge any other lurking snakes, and the belt being quite rotten by now, the kick burst the pouches and sent a shower of glittering stones rolling on the sand.

The captain picked up a handful. 'Emeralds, by gosh !' he exclaimed. 'And beauties. I wonder where these fellows got 'em.'

And there, a few yards away, but invisible to mortal eyes, stood one who could have answered had he had a voice audible to human ears.

Meanwhile the little coral snakes, fidgety and suspicious as ever, wriggled down the beach to cut off the retreat of the intruders. 'Not yet !' cried the man. 'Wait and see what they intend to do.' And the little snakes waited.

From the last pouch the captain drew the oilskin packet : he ripped it open, read the enclosure and handed it to his companion.

'What do you make of this ?' he asked.

'H'm,' replied the other. 'It looks as if somebody's fortune has gone astray. I wonder when this was written—there's no date.'

'What are you going to do with these ?' asked the

captain, pointing to the gems. 'The girl may be dead long ago, and what then?'

'We are going to find her if she is still alive,' said the young man. 'At any rate, we will try to carry out this poor chap's wishes. There's my specimen box in the boat's locker—it will just about hold the stones.'

They fetched the box and filled it with the emeralds. 'Lock these in your safe,' he said, handing it to the captain, but the paper he put carefully away in his pocket-book.

'Well,' he remarked as they once more returned to the boat, 'we've certainly found the beauties of the island, but what about its dangers? I haven't seen many snakes.'

'Then look there.' The captain pointed to the crest of the beach where the little coral snakes were beginning to appear in hundreds, but what they could not see was the figure of a man dancing for joy because an honest man had at last come to the island.

That night, when the yacht was steaming far away from the island, the captain sat alone in his cabin. His eyes were closed and his thoughts were on the emeralds. Emeralds! Flashes of green fire passed behind his closed lids: he could not turn his mind away from them. The desire to handle them again was so insistent that at last he rose and took the box from the safe. What an extraordinary find, and what a fortune for some unknown and unknowing girl. He picked out one of the larger stones and balanced it in the palm of his hand. The value of that one stone would mean affluence to him for the rest of his life. Just that one stone out of all that mass would never be missed. They had not been counted. And if one, why not two, or even more?

He bolted the door and drew the curtains over the port lights, then he arranged the stones in groups on the table according to their size. From these he selected five of the

finest and slipped them into his pocket, but as he was about to replace the others, a slight movement in the box attracted his attention. He bent over it, and next moment something swift and living struck him in the face. He sprang from his chair and staggered across the cabin, screaming and tearing at his face with his hands. A minute later he collapsed and his convulsed body rolled under the table.

They had to burst open the door to get into the cabin, and the first to enter was the young man. His glance fell on the body under the table and the scattered gems and he slammed the door on the startled faces in the alleyway.

As he lifted the dead captain, five emeralds trickled out of his pocket and the young man understood. He wrenched the hands from the distorted face and from under them fell the crushed remains of a little coral snake.

And now, say you, that's a-plenty of death and bloody violence, so overboard it goes with the shrouded remains of the unfortunate captain, and yo-ho ! for a happy ending.

Of course every one of you knows just how this story finishes ; how the young man returned to England and found the girl, and how she was very poor and very pretty, and worked in a shop. And of course you've guessed that they fell in love and were married and lived expensively ever after. But what you do not know is this :

Six months later when the sun was still shining on little green waves still rippling in that very same lagoon, that very same steam yacht anchored off the island and from her side came a boat rowed by four sailors who beached it on the shining sand. Out of the boat stepped two people. One of them was the young man, and the other the young girl. She called him ' Bill ' because she had a perfect right to, and he called her ' Mary ' because she was his wife.

' Why, this is the prettiest island of the lot,' she exclaimed.

'That is one reason why I brought you here,' said he, 'the other being that it is here, right under your feet, where I found your father's legacy to you.'

The girl's eyes filled with tears and she stretched out her arms to the trees. 'Daddy!' she called, and the answer seemed to come back, 'Mary!'

'Did you hear that?' she exclaimed. 'Oh, Bill, there is someone here and he answered me.'

'No, darling,' he said. 'It's only an echo.'

But she called again and again, 'Daddy, oh Daddy' and every time came the answering call, 'Mary, oh Mary.'

'Look! What is that?' she cried, pointing to the crest of the beach where the little coral snakes were appearing in hundreds.

The young man saw them. 'Come quickly, Mary,' he said in alarm, dragging her back to the boat.

As they pushed off, the girl stood up waving her hand and crying 'Good-bye, good-bye, Daddy!' and the whole island seemed to reply, 'Good-bye, good-bye, Mary.'

So they left the island for ever and pulled quickly back to the yacht, and at the water's edge, although they could not see him, stood the smiling figure of a man with arms outstretched towards the receding boat. And round his feet, hundreds, nay, thousands of little coral snakes somersaulted and danced on their tails for sheer joy.

A COUNTRY OF LITTLE HURRY.

BY HENRY HARDINGE.

'HAS Monsieur any commissions?' my old Provençal gardener asked at the end of his day. He fixes the time himself according to the season and the moon and the needs of the earth, with a fine and utter contempt for any forty-hour or other man-made week, and he is paid by like unwritten natural laws. And we are both wholly content.

As he spoke, he shifted on his shoulder the strap of his little wicker basket which is a fixed part of his get-up, ranking about with his coat; not as high as his hat, which is never put off except in brief salutation or reverence—in church, for instance, or when the head of a funeral *cortège* passes. He always wears it in the house, even at meal-times. That is, I am not sure that he sleeps in the hat, but if not, it is the last thing discarded.

'No commissions, thank you,' I replied—'or rather, yes, one, on the part of our neighbour Monsieur Foster. He asks if you will kindly give yourself the trouble, if it does not derange you too much, to be so good as to leave word with the carter to bring up a load of sand, of the finest and at the soonest.'

We always do it like that here, with everybody. We take time to do it. In fact, not being native-born, I was a little brusque. Were I of St. Gaston, I should have come to my point by a much more circuitous conversational route; so leisurely and indirect, indeed, that (not being native-born) I might easily have forgotten what my point was and old Dallibert would never have known that

I had any. As I had blurted it, he accepted the situation courteously.

'But willingly, Monsieur. That is all? Then *au 'voir*, Monsieur.'

Sylvie, a little disturbed by my forthrightness (as she is at times, being herself Provençale), wondering what crisis might be impending to require such haste, spoke a trifle nervously as soon as the old man was gone.

'Monsieur Foster is planning some masonry work of urgency?'

'No, the sand is for the baby to play in.'

'But no, really, without joking?'

'Really, without joking, it is for that.'

'But that, *par exemple*! The baby is only two months old!'

'To-day, yes. But by the time the sand is delivered? It is of that he is thinking, comprehend?'

'Ah, poor dear!' Sylvie laughed. 'I remember all last summer when they were here the electrician kept promising every day to come up in the afternoon, or the next morning without fail, to fix the doorbell, and he never got there until the day they left.'

'Quite so. And when they got back it had run down again and they have begun anew.'

'Truly! And the mason who assured us so often during the winter that he would mend their roof immediately, Monsieur could count upon it, and has not yet come at all.'

'There you are. And look at the surveyors, the *géomètres* as you call them, who have been for five years measuring and calculating for the widening of a bit of the St. Gaston road, and are nowhere near to being ready to set the first stake for the contractors.'

'Monsieur finds that one does not hurry himself too much for the work here in Provence,' Sylvie explained to Jeanne, who had come in with an enquiring smile.

'*Pardi sûr !* I comprehend ! But Monsieur was speaking of the *géomètres*. That understands itself naturally. They are paid by the State, like the road-menders. There is no reason why they should hurry. If they finish any job, one simply gives them another—so what is the use ? But listen, Madame : Madame knows my cousin Simone's René, her first ? Well, she took his shoes to the cobbler's to have them re-soled. She was to have them in a few days. Then he put her off until the next week, but that was the eve of a feast, so of course nobody worked ; and then came the confirmation of his little girl, when naturally one does nothing, and after that it was something else. Well, you know, when she got them finally, René had grown so much bigger that he could no longer get them on his feet.'

'What a shame ! So they were no good to her at all. But she didn't pay for them, of course ?'

'Oh, yes, Madame ! There was no loss, for you see, by that time she had had her second, and he was already so big that very soon they fitted him perfectly.'

'She had some luck, what ?' I suggested.

'*Pardi !*' Jeanne assented enthusiastically.

'But she will lose on the last one, not ?'

Jeanne looked puzzled as she tried to extend the formula to the last term of the series. Then she brightened, dismissing the difficulty and taking refuge in nearer and more certain figures.

'*Ma foi !*' she laughed. 'But there will be a lot more of them before that !'

'Nevertheless,' I persisted, 'that is exaggerated, it seems

to me, to make a customer wait like that. She should have taken the work away from him.'

'But, Monsieur, what would you? There is no hurry. A little sooner, a little later—it is not worth while to make oneself bad blood for that. One will have the work some time, and it will be good. At the bottom, Pascal is trustworthy. Another might lose the things entirely in the meantime, not? And everything goes like that. It is more than two years already that Madame Richard, the dress-maker, has had the material for a robe for *maman*. We took it to her more than two years ago. But when we have complained, she has assured us that she has other things from a year before that.'

'But what the devil does she do, then, if she never does anything for anybody?'

'Oh, but she does. There's the mayor's wife, she passes first, and the doctor's wife, she passes next. Or at least, she did until the Colonel's lady—his friend, that is—came to St. Gaston. And when they are not there, there is a wedding, or a communion, or someone going on a journey, comprehend? To be finished by a given time. And afterwards one must rest from the hurry, comprehend? But the worst for us others is Mademoiselle la Commandante. They call her that because she is not yet promoted to be Madame la Colonelle, comprehend? She and Madame the doctor's wife do not frequent any more, on account of jealousy over the dressmaking. But it is Mademoiselle who gets hers done.'

'What is her secret? Couldn't one learn it?'

'*Ma foi!* As to that,' Jeanne laughed, 'you know, for me it is because they find themselves in the same category. Madame Richard and her friend are not married, either. But for that she has good reason. Her poor husband was

a functionary of some kind, and since his death she has a pension. If she married again she would lose it. So what is the use of hurrying to the *mairie*, so long as everybody understands? They can wait anyway until there is going to be a reason, comprehend?’

‘I see. We have always been told that the French are a very practical people. But it looks to me as if your mother would never get her dress.’

‘Oh, yes, Monsieur! For this year my little sister makes her first communion, and for that we shall all have all our things. For a communion, not even Richard would fail. And you see, Monsieur, if *maman*’s dress had been finished up quickly, say in a year or so after Richard had the material, *maman* would have worn it and it would have no longer done for the communion. She would have to have another, and what would she do with two dresses afterwards?’

‘I see. Haste would have made waste, what?’

‘*Pardi!*’ Jeanne affirmed, positively.

Provence.

THE WOOING.

BY ALAN JENKINS.

FAR below the little hills of drab heather, the dim blue sea lay placid as ice so that the black boats seemed bound in it. At the foot of the cliffs a white line revealed the creeping tide. Mile upon mile north and south you could watch this foam stealing into each little cove and imagine the sweet ringing cries of the oyster-catchers as they rose reluctantly before it. South lay the glittering roofs of Deerstock, with a Welsh collier waiting outside to enter the harbour that could accommodate but one ship at a time. North lay the ruined quay where the old people used to take their pig to bed with them when tides were running high. How much you could pick out! A thousand fields, a hundred woods, cottage and rectory and the grey walls of the priory, all could be identified. You felt a small secret pride at being able to do so, even if you weren't with anyone you could impress by your lore.

His slim body warm with expectation, the boy loped on along the rough track of the ridge, the hooded falcon docile and patient on his gauntleted wrist, the setter questing eagerly ahead, watched by a staid spaniel who wagged a faint, approving tail.

The very loneliness and stillness of the hills was exciting: it was as if you were penetrating an unexplored land, and produced a vague feeling of ecstasy in your belly. There was no sound under the spring sky save the rolling clatter of red quartz-stones as you trudged, and sometimes a lark

bounding away with a *whit whit* that had a falsely helpless note about it.

And the wine-clear air!—nostrils were not enough to draw in that exhilarating draught: he opened his wide mouth, laughing silently for sheer joy, and drew a deep, lung-swelling breath.

His keen senses made restless by hope and welded into one coiled spring so that he walked jerkily with tenseness, he followed the setter through the heather. You might walk an hour and not flush a grouse, there were so few. They were active and pugnacious now in their mating: the grey dawns of the hills were loud with their assertive challenges as cock answered cock with a *Wherra wherra, cok-cok-cok!* which, being interpreted, means *Take care, I am the Cock of the hills, I will rend you with my spurs!* By law they should have been left in peace these three months—but what was the law when you had the hills to yourself and a sharp-set falcon on your wrist? In such circumstances life was too good to admit of restraint. Only those who could not look after themselves loved the law.

Methodically the flame-throated Gordon setter went ranging and quartering, drawing up to his point after the grouse he had winded, which, if they were there at all, would be creeping away through the dull green heather. Past an ancient barrow, where a warrior slept with his household bronze beside him, the plumey tail stiffened, the tip vibrated with momentary uncertainty, then went rigid, and in that position the dog waited faithfully.

Defly the boy struck the tufted Dutch hood and slipped it off the round head. The falcon bobbed faintly and submissively. Her proud eyes were revealed, dark gleaming pools, neither beaten nor nervous, but defiant and alert.

With a sweep of the boy's arm she was sent winnowing out into the immaculate sky.

Far and wide she circled, as if seizing the opportunity of freedom, but this was in order to reach her pitch, towards which she continued to soar, fading from rufous to black until she seemed like some large swift curving up there.

In the meantime, the boy, followed by the spaniel, circled a dozen yards ahead of the immobile setter. He waited for the falcon to settle at her pitch, and presently, ceasing to rise, she cruised round leisurely, resting on her rigid wings. She was ready. The boy moved forward. He heard the startling whirr of wings as a solitary grouse got up and sped across the slope like a brown stone hurled from a catapult, but he did not see it, for he was watching the falcon.

She tipped over head-first, and with talons dangling ready for the kill and wings curving back about her tail, came falling a thousand feet at awe-inspiring speed, cleaving the air with a rocket-like swish.

She fell behind the grouse and, closing on him in a sharp swoop, struck him down and beat up again immediately. The sound of the impact was like the driving of fist into palm. Brown feathers burst out and drifted to earth with an indifference symbolic of nature's. The grouse dropped like the polished stone he resembled, but without an instant's pause, bounced out of the heather and sped on bowed wings in the opposite direction, fiercely pursued by the falcon.

But in straight flight the grouse was a match for the peregrine, and the few yards he gained allowed him to plunge headlong into the nearest heatherscrag, to crouch there in terror, his back laid bald and bloody between the wings by the falcon's hind talon.

Baulked, the falcon went ringing round, waiting for the

melancholy spaniel, sent forward by the boy, to flush the cock.

Hearing the dog brushing through the heather, the hardy old cock left his refuge and began to creep and wind ahead. He knew only too well what awaited him in the sky and he would rather run the risk of being caught by the dog than face those devastating talons a second time. He was hard-fleshed and robust, the old cock, both fighting and wooing there was the same intense energy about him, whether he was hurling himself at a rival or leaping in the air and descending with tense wings in a love-display before one of his mates.

As patient as the grouse was wily, the spaniel unravelled the warm scent, and not until the questing muzzle almost touched him did the cock get up and clatter away to plunge into another refuge before the stooping falcon could fall upon him.

The falcon did not stoop. She had soared higher and her keen eyes were not on the panic-stricken grouse but on another bird which had appeared high above the moor from the sea. To the boy's mingled excitement and perturbation he saw that the new-comer was another peregrine, a tiercel, judging by its inferior size. Fearful of the falcon wandering off, he whistled her, but she was too interested in the intruder. She screamed angrily, a rapid, wire-hard chatter, and circled uncertainly about him. Higher she winnowed to gain pitch and stooped abruptly. The wild tiercel dodged and mounted in his turn, but instead of taking the opportunity to attack, sheered off out of range. Again the resentful falcon pursued him into the sky and together they strove for pitch, screaming as they sparred, the falcon to gain height for a second assault, the tiercel in order to avoid her onslaught. The falcon would not leave him alone and,

missing her stoop again through her impetuosity, suddenly struck at him from beneath and crabbed him with vicious claws. Down they fluttered thus to earth, screaming and grappling all the while.

The boy ran towards them, but no sooner had they landed than they fell apart and, rising once more, resumed their sparring. With wonderful dexterity they dodged and twisted to avoid each other's attacks, until at last the tiercel beat high out of reach and to the boy's relief the falcon left him. When he swung out the lure, a pad of leather adorned with the wings of a grouse, she came down in a magnificent stoop and stood on it, waiting passively for him to take her on his wrist again.

He dared not risk flying her again while the tiercel was still in the neighbourhood and so, slipping on the hood, he set his face towards the sea and home.

The wild tiercel was not to be denied.

Two days later, when the dimness had left the sea and the water matched the windswept sky, the boy took the falcon out again on the hillslopes that crouched over the cliffs as a tawny beast waits for its prey.

Majestically she descended from the clouds to strike her quarry down, and this time the stricken lay where it fell. While she stood on the slain, fastidiously plucking the rich red and black feathers preparatory to enjoying the fruits of victory, a bird small as an eyelash appeared from the cliffs.

The boy lay on his belly on the quartz-stones spying into Spayad Combe for deer when he caught in the corner of his eye the sharp movement of the falcon's head as she glanced up at the sky.

Instinctively he followed her piercing stare and saw the tiercel cruising high up, not daring to approach because of

his presence. He clambered to his feet to take the falcon on his wrist and cursed himself for not pegging her down properly while she fed. Instead, he had merely anchored the leash by a few flat stones. Before he could reach her she had screamed and winnowed out, dragging the leash with her. Impotently he stood there whistling frantically and twirling the lure far and wide to bring her down. The excited setter ranged about, questing for a grouse, knowing something was wrong that the falcon should have been sent out before he had done his part.

Encumbered by the trailing leash the falcon mounted to meet the tiercel. At first she seemed inclined to treat the stranger as brusquely as she had at their other encounter, but after having striven heavily to soar above him, she cruised about screaming in her vehement tongue. These preliminaries concluded, they did begin to spar, and the tiercel, mounting more quickly, stooped, but instead of completing the attack, swerved aside at the last moment, and when she in her turn stooped, despite the handicap of the leash, she too veered purposely away while he dodged and winnowed up to continue the play.

Far below, the boy watched this play with an anxiety that increased when he began to realise that the two birds were not by any means antagonistic : the tiercel was seeking a mate, and the falcon, though she had been in captivity for nearly a year, was responding to his suit. Her wild instincts had not faded : they lived, a latent flame.

Vainly the boy continued to whistle her as he humped through the heather to keep them in sight. She was deaf to all but the chattering of the tiercel ; nor would she deign to notice the lure which he hopefully paused to swing again. Falcon and tiercel played across the sky, still not quite certain of each other, for the mating-urge had not yet over-

come their common mistrust, and vanished beyond the slope of the combe.

He had given up hope of seeing her again when, half an hour later, the pugnacious churring of missel-thrushes drew him to a hawthorn in the depths of the combe. On a lichen-bearded branch she sat morosely, the small wind searching through the barred feathers of her breast, the Indian bells on her shanks tinkling faintly.

High above the combe the wild tiercel uttered an *akakak* of warning, crying to his new-found mate to beware of Man.

For several days the boy confined the falcon to the hawk-house, a proud title for a ramshackle place made by knocking down the louse-ridden stalls of a stable. If he waited long enough he knew the wild tiercel would wander away, seeking a mate elsewhere. But there were few peregrines along the coast and this, though it did not occur to him, was the reason for the tiercel's desperation. With brand and gun the peregrines had been harried up and down the coast of the county: ignorance and selfishness had combined, as they always do, to destroy beauty.

Day after day the falcon sat idle on a weathering-block in the sunshine outside the mews and the boy spent all the time he could with her, fearful that she, his most treasured possession, for which he would have given his right hand, would suffer in his absence. Actually the opposite was true, for his continual attention irked the bird. But she had become part of his life, and in this case the cliché meant what it said. The thought of anything happening to her caused him pangs of almost physical sickness. He had had her nearly a year now: he had stolen her from an eyrie miles down the coast, when she was a mass of white down, all beak and claws. Anchored by crowbar and rope he had

gone over the cliff amongst the crouching primroses and the dead teasels and brought back the eyass in a sack. Many patient months had gone in manning her : breaking her to the hood, flying her to the lure and, when the purple of heather was fading from the little hills, flying her at a quarry hardy and strong-winged.

But even in captivity the lonely tiercel found her, so urgent was his desire for a mate. The mating-urge, or love as we sublimely call it, is a goad that drives the creatures of the wild relentlessly. The fox goes padding miles through the midwinter night in search of the vixen whose weird scream calls him ; the dog will not rest nor cease from fighting until he finds his bitch.

Coming out to feed the falcon one afternoon, the boy noticed the hens huddling under the quinces by the farm-yard pond, and glancing up, saw the unmistakable wings of the tiercel curving high overhead, for there is a neatness and dash about the peregrine possessed by no other bird. Up went the falcon's head. Her keen eyes stared at the cruising tiercel. She screamed and impetuously flew to meet him, but flapping violently was brought back at the end of the leash that held her by the shanks.

Hurriedly the boy bore her into the mews out of the disturbing presence of the tiercel. She manifested her feelings by bating : struggling and lashing as she griped his gloved wrist, and puffing out every feather of her trim body.

Thenceforth her whole condition and temper began to deteriorate. The bloom of health faded from her plumage ; beak and claws lost their polish. Had it not been too early in the year, the boy would have thought she was ailing for the moult.

The real reason was all too plain : she was fretting for the wild tiercel who continued to haunt the neighbourhood of

the farm, and by some subtle instinct which man, growing insensitive through the ages, has lost, she always knew when he was near. There is a bond of sympathy between animals that extends beyond the bounds of mere physical contact.

The thought of this affected the boy deeply as he held the falcon on his fist one day. Another, wider aspect of nature had been revealed to him by the tiercel's devotion. He had not realised before what powerful emotions wild creatures could experience; they began to seem more than the dumb, insensate beings he had hitherto looked upon them as. The possibility of his own loss paled into insignificance beside the beauty of this strange, silent courtship.

He unhooded the falcon. The proud, defiant eyes glared out. It seemed almost a crime to cover them, it was like extinguishing a beautiful light, and with a sudden flush of blood he bethought himself that it was he alone who was to blame. He replaced the hood, his course decided. He felt better for having made up his mind.

That same day he started to soak the falcon's meat in water instead of feeding it to her with all its rich juices. This he had always done normally on the evening before he took her out hawking, in order to get her sharp-set and therefore keener on the chase. Now he did it with a different object. Three days he continued to feed her thus on washed meat until she was growing angry with insidious hunger and would mantle jealously over her food. She longed for a good bloody crop.

On the third day he hooded and leashed her and bore her out on to the hills. He had walked an hour and was making down the seaward slopes before the tiercel appeared from the cliffs. Quickly he undid the leash and jesses. He hesitated momentarily when it came to the unhooding, but setting his lips, slipped the tufted hood from the falcon's head.

For a last time he gazed at the noble eyes, and then, as if afraid that by gazing too long he might be tempted from his decision, he abruptly cast her off. Out she launched, righted herself, and circled uncertainly above him by habit, waiting on for the setter to do his part. Then, seeing the tiercel, she soared higher to meet him, for he was reluctant to come nearer while the boy was there. For a while they circled each other as if unsure whether to approach, like people meeting after a quarrel. They came nearer and, screaming, sparred into the sky, trying to soar above one another, and gradually played across the hillslopes towards the cliffs.

A long time the boy stood there, striving to follow their flight, until at last they vanished. When that was so he turned away and, strangely happy, loped homeward down the clattering quartz-stones, leash and jesses dangling in his hand, the little Indian bells tinkling faintly in accompaniment to his nervous stride.

A COTTAGE LOAF.

BY MABEL DAWSON.

*'I knew by the smoke which so gracefully curled
Above the green trees, that a cottage was near,
And I said: "If there's peace to be found in this world,
A heart that is happy could hope for it here."*

(The Woodpecker.)

It is possible that one had inadvertently stepped under a ladder, or gazed at the new moon through glass; and on the other hand, is it absolutely impossible that the Lares and Penates of the Smugglers' Cottage were wreaking vengeance on me for my seeming neglect of their domain? I say 'seeming,' for in reality the dear little place had rarely been out of my thoughts, but many pressing engagements in Surrey had kept me rooted there for over two months, during which time I had been unable to visit my cottage.

For those who have not seen the latter or read about it elsewhere, I must explain that it lies somewhere in Sussex, contains six rooms, and dates back to the seventeenth century, and it is what would generally be called a 'week-end cottage,' but as I am there just as frequently in the middle as at the end of the week, I prefer to give it the rightful title, though I am aware that in this respect many householders may differ from me, for it is not uncommon to find a house facing due north and surrounded by trees, yet rejoicing in the name of 'Sunnyside'; also a bungalow overlooking the gas-works which is 'Bella Vista'; and another of that ilk, on an arterial road, sandwiched between others of its kind, announcing itself as 'Mon Répos.'

But to return to my own cottage, where during my

enforced absence several untoward events had taken place. Firstly, Mussolini had smashed down the garden wall and devoured my cabbages ; secondly, the brown owls had taken possession of the cottage ; and lastly, the ' Proud Ladye ' had acquired a disfiguring smudge on her elegant nose. Mussolini in this case is not Il Duce, but a powerful red bullock who grazed in the field behind the cottage. He was one of a herd and their acknowledged leader, and I gave him this name because of his likeness to his ' god-father ' ; also he possessed a large fund of ambition and—as subsequent events proved—great driving power.

With a high brick wall between us this beast and I became good friends, and if I were gardening with my delightful ball-bearing wheelbarrow (which would walk upstairs if asked to do so), Mussolini would come up to the wall and accept any bits of greenery which I threw over for his benefit. Also he would occasionally stretch out his thick neck and nibble the top of a hollyhock which has aspired to outgrow the wall.

After we had left the cottage and gone back to Surrey, Mrs. X, the woman who ' does for me ' at the former, came down to open the windows, and on entering the garden gate she heard a loud rumbling noise like to a falling avalanche followed by a mighty roar, and lo ! Mussolini and his attendant satellites (in this case *red*, not black shirts) came pouring through a large gap in the wall, and then in massed formation the whole herd galloped down the garden, heading for the cabbage plot, whereupon Mrs. X turned and fled for her life. Later the farmer's men arrived and drove the herd back to their meadow, placing hurdles against the broken wall as a barrier to future raids.

On hearing of this catastrophe I took Counsel's opinion—which sounds more important than ' I consulted my Solicitor.'

As a matter of fact 'Counsel' was lunching with us, and his opinion was volunteered and not demanded, for I hold it a breach of hospitality to invite a person to share one's salt and then proceed to pick his brains. And the upshot of this advice was that the farmer and not myself was responsible for the damage, but knowing that the former was of a dilatory nature, I decided to do the repairs at my own expense, but sent a warning note to the farmer, 'Don't do it again or it will be the worse for you,' or words to that effect.

The affair of the owls was a less alarming but more difficult matter. Having visitors in the cottage, I suggested that Mrs. X should sleep in the 'skillingroom,' which is a tiny chamber over the cellar and adjoining an outhouse where I keep coals at one end and garden tools at the other, among these a garden roller which was evolved for me by my 'odd man' from an empty oil drum which he filled with cement and added stout iron handles, painting it all a lively green. The only drawback to this roller is that it possesses an unpleasant sense of humour, for when you least expect it the handle comes forward suddenly and gives you a nasty crack on the head. Mrs. X went to bed in the skillingroom, but the following morning she informed me that she had been kept awake all night with a 'scrabbling on the walls' and believed that a man was trying to climb up the house and get into her bedroom. I was somewhat surprised to hear this, still, 'De gustibus, etc.,' but I could only suggest that she took up a pannikin of scalding porridge, and that when next the would-be marauder was heard, she should cast the pannikin on to his head—explaining that this was the way our ancestors defended their castles during the Middle Ages—but later Mrs. X announced: 'I find it isn't a man, but just howls.' 'Howls!' I said shakily, visualising the Banshee (for one of my grandmothers was a 'Descendant').

'Yes,' said Mrs. X, 'small brown howls,' and went on to explain how, glancing through her window, she had seen two brown owls fly past which alighted at the outhouse door and then disappeared.

I was distinctly puzzled, for this door is kept locked, but on making an examination I discovered a gap of some two inches between the door and the lintel, which would just permit of entry if the birds squatted down on their little brown bellies and then wriggled through, and on making an inspection of the roof with the aid of a ladder, I could plainly hear the birds moving about above me.

The day we were leaving the cottage, my spaniel wandered into the skillingroom, and hearing uncanny noises in the wall there she scratched a hole in the lath and plaster. I left word that my man should come and repair this, but before he could do so Mrs. X, again coming down to the cottage, found the owls in possession. Mr. Owl was contemplating the view from my bedroom window, Mrs. Owl was enjoying a noonday siesta at the foot of my bed, while downstairs the young Owls were practising the latest dance steps on our dining-table. Mrs. X then proceeded to drive these birds out of the house, but of this task she felt somewhat chary, for lately had not a grey owl flown at a policeman while out on his nightly beat in London, and severely bitten his dignified nose? However, first opening all windows and doors, Mrs. X armed herself with a duster and eventually the birds were safely evacuated.

I imagine that driving out owls is child's play to doing that ilk by bats, for I well remember a summer night in the country, and I was just getting into bed when I received an S.O.S. from my sister requesting me to come and help her drive one of these vampires out of her bedroom. So, shrouding ourselves in sheets from head to foot (for bats

can entangle themselves in one's hair), and using bath towels as weapons, we rushed about the room looking like two demented spectres. Sometimes we tripped over our sheets and fell headlong, or collided with one another, ducking our heads as the bat flew straight at us ; while the latter now disappeared behind the wardrobe or clung to the pictures, nearly fell into the toilet jug, and went in every direction except the window ; and the room appeared like a dormitory rag—pictures awry, pillows on the ground—till at last, breathless with running and hysterical laughter, we sat down on the bed to discuss other methods, then the bat glided softly to the window and out into the darkness from whence it had come. ' Oh, lovely, lovely night in June.' (I shan't forget that night too soon.)

Now with regard to the ' Proud Ladye ' whose nose had been smudged (and I fancy the owls were responsible for this). Her history is rather a strange one, for nobody knows who she was or from whence she originally came. Being in my laundress's cottage one day, I noticed a handsome antique frame on the wall, within which, set in an oval of gilt laurel leaves, was an oil painting displaying the dim outlines of a lady's face above an old-fashioned dress. On enquiring the history of this, I was informed that, attracted by the frame, the present owner had paid half a crown for it at the local Jumble Sale ; there was then only a ' black canvas ' visible, and the laundress, taking a scrubbing brush and some soap, set to work to clean this and there appeared the ' dim outlines ' that I have mentioned. Some weeks later I received a note from the laundress, saying that this picture had fallen down and the frame was smashed to atoms, so as she had no place for it now she asked if I would care to purchase it ' for ten shillings,' as ' I know you are fond of old things,' she added. So I took the picture and a friend

who has made a study of this cleaned it for me, and rising like a phoenix from the ashes, appeared a young female with a beautiful complexion, auburn hair, two cold grey eyes, a perfect nose, a rosebud mouth, and clad in a very low-cut robe of moonlight blue satin and lace. Judging by the skin-tints it might be a Lely, but the dress is of a slightly later period and may be of Kneller's time, or even an early Gainsborough. That the lady was someone of importance I feel certain, as her mien is most haughty, but though I have questioned everyone in the place, none of them admit to having sent her to the Jumble Sale, and I have also scanned the Hampton Court, Windsor beauties and the National Portrait Gallery, all in vain, to discover her replica. Having found the lady a suitable frame, she now hangs in my cottage dining-room, which was once the old kitchen, so the fair dame has not yet gone up a great deal in the social scale, but there she is, and greets me with a haughty stare when I sit down to feed. While I am away from the cottage there is no one to gaze on her charms save two framed wax medallions of Wordsworth and Dorothy, and a charming little Rockingham figure of Milton in his youth with a large volume under his arm. I like to dream that when the cottage stands deserted and the moonbeams steal through the windows at the witching hour of midnight, Milton makes a bow to the lady and declaims his *L'Allegro*: 'Where perhaps some Beauty lies, The cynosure of neighbouring eyes.' My lady might appreciate these lines, for they would remind her of the lovers who once knelt at her shrine, but should Wordsworth, following suit, announce that 'Lucy was a cottage child' my lady would say with a frown: 'La, Sir! I find you mighty tedious.'

One of the many charms of an ancient house is that it gives such play to the imagination, especially if the former is

furnished with antiques. I fancy that my spice cupboard may have come from 'the fine house of Sir John Bank' at Peckham, whom John Evelyn visited, for it was at Peckham I discovered the cupboard and it is of unusual size, most richly carved, and is of the Jacobean or Stuart period. It is strange to remember what an important part spices once played in culinary matters, and how valuable they were, for Queen Bess was most insistent on obtaining her share of a cargo of these which Drake had captured from the Spaniards, and which was valued at several thousand pounds.

Herbs are some other things much neglected to-day, though a *sine qua non* in our ancestors' dishes. I felt it was only appropriate to an ancient house to start a herb garden, so now I have 'rosemary for remembrance' and can 'wear my rue with a difference'; also there are Tansy, Marjoram, Basil, Fennel and many others of the kind. Only Sweet Cicely, whose name had so charmed me, refused to respond to my love-call, but I shall woo her again and again till at last she is mine.

I began with relating the mishaps to my cottage, and now I will describe some of the charms that the latter possesses, but if I begin to expatiate on these I may never know when to stop. In the first place the cottage is secluded but not isolated, for it is but five minutes' walk from the main road and lies down a quiet lane, and is surrounded by meadows on both sides and possesses lovely views of the southern Downs. The garden in summer is bright with flowers and the cottage is equally attractive at all seasons. It has an extremely bright yet restful atmosphere, and I believe that the smugglers who once owned it were charming people in spite of their contraband habits.

With care and love—taking my time over it—I have furnished the cottage with small pieces of antique furniture

and have decorated its walls with old coloured prints and an antique mirror or two, which add to the apparent size of the rooms. Bright cotton curtains of an old-fashioned cottage design hang near the windows, and there are comfortable armchairs in both sitting-rooms. One of the latter—once the front kitchen, with a smooth flagstone floor—is now my dining-room; it is delightfully cool in summer and cosy and warm in winter, with its spacious hearth and thick, well-built walls.

This is a labour-saving age, but in that respect my cottage is somewhat lacking, for it has no gas or electricity, but our cooking is admirably accomplished on an oil stove. We have a pure and unending water supply. I burn coal in the fireplaces and use an Aladdin lamp at night, and for me the slight inconveniences of the old house are more than compensated for by its peace and charm. Personally, I could never become really attached to a modern house, being one of these foolishly sentimental people who like tradition and romance in their lives.

I had first viewed this cottage when it had been standing empty for two years, and at once saw the possibilities of the place which evidently (fortunately for me) others had failed to perceive. In fact, after I had owned the place for a year a friend, who had seen it while it was empty, confessed that she had thought me 'rather mad' to contemplate purchasing, 'But,' she added kindly, 'I now see that you are a fairy who came and waved her wand around this Cinderella cottage and transformed it into this perfectly charming abode.' But the merit was not really mine, but due to the fact that my Pandora box gave me a little imagination, so that I was able to glimpse the charm of the place where others (less fortunate in this quality) had failed to do so. Certainly, acquiring this little property has added great zest to my life.

I thoroughly enjoyed the work of picking up old furniture for it, and I laboured like a Trojan in the garden with most gratifying results. I believe the flowers know who love them, and for me they have given of their brightest and best. Now if I wish to leave the 'Madding crowd' and rest my eyes and mind, I fly to my cottage and its sweetness and charm refresh my body and bring peace to my soul. As I often go down there alone my friends have asked if I do not feel 'dull and lonely in the country.' I answer: 'Never.' I am not far from the sea, which I love, and in open weather the garden keeps me busy and happy. I take with me books that are suitable to the atmosphere, old-fashioned and restful authors such as Jane Austen, Trollope, etc.; poets both ancient and modern, and books that hold a country spirit such as Richard Jefferies and Virgil's works—also some modern magazines, and fortified with these I recline (weather suitable) under the boughs of an ancient apple tree whose fruit I still garner in autumn. Before me stretch the South Downs, and behind, the garden with its old well, bucket and windlass surrounded by cobble-stones, and where in summer bloom cat-mint, campanulas, blue flax, love-in-a-mist, snow-in-summer, etc., and I feel that 'My lot has fallen unto me in a fair ground.'

The summer is here at last, and the voice of the cuckoo is heard in the land, and to-morrow I go to this cottage again. So 'Rise up, my fair one, and come away,' and I turn to my golden cocker who sleeps at my feet, but the answer comes from another quarter where two mischievous eyes are regarding me. 'Nay, mistress, it is *I* that am black but comely who will come with thee, for my sister the fair and golden one careth most for the fleshpots and naught for the sport that thy cottage provides, but *I* know the stream where the water-rats swim and the gap in the hedge where the cat

would come through to rifle the nests of thy much-loved songbirds. My sister shall stay with our Master, but I will follow thee wherever thou goest,' and I answer : ' So be it, Leila, but the gods judge between me and thee if thou bitest the Baker, for though for thee he is an enemy, for me he beareth the staff of Life.'

I shall reach the cottage at noon. Mrs. X will be there with a smile and a broom (the former she throws at me). Inside the house confusion will reign for a space, for the place has been swept but not garnished, and mattresses, pillows and blankets are airing in front of a fire. There is much to be done, but at seven o'clock I shall sit down to a meal of spring chicken, my own vegetables and one of Mrs. X's excellent apple turnovers, for verily her pastry is like gossamer, and eaten with ' lashings ' of cream is indeed most delectable.

Later I shall walk in my garden and gather large nosegays of flowers to place in the rooms ; then the sun will sink down in the west leaving incarnadined clouds in its wake, while over the meadows steal soft mists from the sea, and night-scented stock, blended with meadow-sweet from the lane, waft their perfume around me. And when darkness begins to descend I shall climb to my quaint little bedroom with the rose-wreathed wallpaper, Chippendale wash-stand, Spode ewer and basin, and the antique oak chest of drawers that it contains, and I trust I shall slumber serenely. No cars will steal by in the night, casting lurid reflections on mirror and wall (which happens in Surrey). I shall wake to hear the ' Mavis sing its love song to the dawn ' or the farm boy whistling down the lane on his way to work. I shall look down on green meadows now laid up for hay, but when last I stayed in my cottage little lambs were frisking about here, and as I heard their plaintive bleats I would recall some

doggerel which my grandmother said had a vogue when she was a child, and which, of course, were in honour of Jane :

*' Sense and Sensibility ! Oh, La !
I heard a little lamb say Ba-a
And methought it said " Mama." '*

And why not ? For where should we be without imagination ? And if ' We are such stuff as dreams are made of '—then—Life for the most part is just what we choose to make of it.

ADVERSITY.

*Dim vistaed is the path that lies
Toward the days to be,
Storm racked and louring are the skies
Above a surging sea :
And far beyond my seeing eyes
Stretches infinity.*

*Shelter—where shall thy haunts be found
As I go on afar ?
Thunders the wind, with raging sound,
Across the harbour bar :
And all of life above the ground
Is but a flickering star.*

*Mirthless and tortured is the hall
Where failure's knell doth toll !
Somewhere, somehow, a voice shall call,
Bidding me see the whole :
With understanding peace shall fall
Upon my questing soul.*

ANNE HUNT.

THE UNKNOWN GOD.

BY PHILIPPA GALLOWAY.

'So this is Tertius' latest fancy!' Ion, striding through the silent street, paused a moment before a niche in the wall of a house. It had been converted into an altar and lately decorated, and the flowers lay wilting in the noonday sun. A wreath of flowers crowned the little plinth of Pentelicus marble that should have borne a statue, and on the ledge below it were inscribed the words 'To the unknown God.'

Ion stood a moment gazing absent-mindedly, and then, roused by the fierce intensity of the heat that surged from the sun-baked wall in a blinding glare, he knocked at the door adjoining the shrine, and without waiting for an answer, went in.

The court-yard on which the door opened was plunged in shadow, and in the farthest corner where the shade was deepest, a man lay stretched on a couch, apparently asleep, but as Ion approached, he opened his eyes, folded his arms under his head and said: 'I knew you would come!' For a moment his pale-blue eyes blazed on his visitor, and then he closed them again.

'My dear Tertius, you are mistaken. I was on my way to visit poor old Stychus, with no intention of calling here. But when I saw this absurdity you have set in your wall—"To the unknown God"—I could not resist dropping in to ask the "whys and wherefores."' "

Once again the pale-blue eyes were opened.

'You came here because I wanted you to. My trivial

wants are always supplied ; though certainly, good Ion, no one would call you a triviality. I find it a curious, but an absolute fact, that if I think long enough about anything or any person, they materialise in one way or another. I have been thinking for the last hour or so that I would like to see your cheerful face shining with the noonday heat, and here you are !

Ion leant his generous body against a pillar and smiled. 'As I am here, I cannot argue, and if I would, it is too hot. What is it you want, and what is this new game of yours ? The setting sun will see me on Areopagus ; so stop your nonsense and let us have a sensible talk. To begin with . . . this altar of yours.'

Tertius flung his legs off the couch and sat up. 'It explains itself. I have visited all the great temples of Attica, indeed of Greece itself. Where the Ægean breaks in white surf about the cliffs of Sunion, I have worshipped the God Poseidon, and asked his protection for my only sister on a day of storm when she was sailing from Eubœa, after a visit to my uncle there. And that same night, the storm, already wild, increased tenfold, and she was drowned. Her name was Nausicaa. My mother loved the tale of the Phæacian maid that old Homer tells. Like her namesake she was "dowered with beauty by the Gods," and she is dead.'

Ion nodded. 'It is hard to think of gentle Nausicaa as dead ; I can shut my eyes and hear her laughter now.' A hush fell on the two men for a moment, and they looked away from each other, and then Ion spoke again : 'But still you have not answered my question.'

Tertius stretched out his hand and drew close to the couch a little tripod stand on which stood a jewelled coffer lined with silk and divided into small compartments. In each compartment lay a gem exquisitely engraved. He

took one out of sardonyx on which was represented, in most perfect detail, the figure of a girl carrying a pitcher. Laying it on the palm of his hand, he watched the light strike colour from it, and bring into sharp relief the infinitesimal beauty of the drapery. He sat quite still for a moment, and when he spoke he did not raise his eyes but continued to stare fixedly at the gem in his hand. 'This little gem I gave to Daphne when we were betrothed. She was as fair and frail as the first Asphodel, and she was very dear to me. We were never man and wife. She died, holding this gem, shaken by some strange fever, two days before our wedding day. I wept and cried to all the Gods for her delivery, but they were deaf; or rather, say there were no Gods.'

Ion held up his hand. 'Come, Tertius, you are hard with the Gods. Perhaps it is well the lady Daphne died—she might have lived to sorrow.'

Tertius looked up. 'Yes, to sorrow perhaps, but just as much to joy.' He placed the little gem gently into its compartment and closed the lid of the coffer. 'And so two of the people I loved most were taken from me. Why should old crippled hags creep on the streets, and they who loved to feel the turf under their dancing feet lie still and cold?'

Ion sighed. His fat good-natured face was troubled, it sagged in unaccustomed lines. This was unusual talk from Tertius; but now he thought he understood the meaning of the little altar; Tertius was ever a cynic. Still all this was ancient history. Tertius was thirty or more, and these things had happened years before. Something must have occurred just lately to rouse the pain in these old wounds again. He shuffled uneasily in the silence, looking at the bowed head of the younger man, and then moving over, sat on the edge of the couch and put his hand on Tertius'

shoulder. 'But still you have your poetry. That at least is yours.'

The shoulder under his hand rose and sank in a dejected shrug. 'That is where you are mistaken. It is not mine, nor ever was; or if it was, there was so little of it that the spring has run dry. Why, old Stychnus' idiot brother could make a better rhyme than I to-day. What is it that Plato says of poets? . . . "For the authors of those great poems which we admire do not attain to excellence through rules of any art, but they utter their beautiful melodies of verse in a state of inspiration, and as it were, possessed by a spirit not their own. . . . For the souls of the poets, as poets tell us, have this peculiar ministration in the world. They tell us that these souls, flying like bees from flower to flower, and wandering over the gardens and the meadows, and the honey-flowing fountains of the Muses, return to us laden with the sweetness of melody; and arrayed as they are in the plumes of rapid imagination, they speak truth." It is quite obvious that what wings I had have moulted to a serious extent.' He laughed, and turning flung his arm across Ion's shoulders, and they sat thus, side by side on the couch, an incongruous couple, and then Tertius sprang up. 'But come, I have something far more interesting to talk to you about; a most exquisite ring.' He opened the coffer, and taking out the top tray, beckoned Ion to his side. Together they stood and gazed at the great emerald lying on its bed of Tyrian silk.

'Not another like it in the world. That old Jew who lives near the Theatre of Dionysius found it for me.'

Ion's eyes glittered with admiration. He clasped his plump hands in an impassioned gesture. 'What size, what colour, and what workmanship—magnificent!'

'You like it, then?' Tertius turned his strange eyes upon the enthusiastic Ion.

Ion's plump cheeks were wreathed in smiles, his little dark eyes glowed like hot coals. 'Like it! I covet it more than anything I have ever seen!'

'Unnecessary,' said Tertius; 'you cannot covet what is yours.'

Ion drew back. 'Tertius; are you mad to give this to me? It is fabulous!'

'I am mad enough for that, it seems, but not enough to be a poet.' His heavy-lidded eyes sheathed themselves as he flung himself down on the couch; his momentary gaiety had gone again.

Ion stood gazing at the ring. His little collection of old rings to be enriched with this. It was stupendous. He turned to the long lithe figure on the couch. 'What can I say, Tertius? I should not accept it, it is too much. But it is stronger than I am. Thank you—thank you!' He seized the long thin hand and kissed it.

Tertius lay with eyes still closed, his face, with its frame of black hair, masked in a stiff immobility. Ion took the ring in his deft fat fingers, and seating himself at the foot of the couch, became lost in almost reverential contemplation of its beauties.

An hour had passed since Ion's arrival, and the intense heat was yielding to a little gusty breeze that came from the sea, breathing a welcome freshness into the heavy air.

For a long time the two men remained silent, with that comfortable, unquestioning, healing silence that is only possible between old and good friends. Tertius broke it with a heavy sigh.

'The philosophers are all very well, but they consume themselves with words. They hide the simplest truth

beneath a mountain of words, so that seekers after truth must burrow like rabbits into these man-made mountains, and long before they can perceive so much as a glimmer of their goal, they are completely lost. Words . . . Words . . . What I want is actuality. I love you, my good friend, but beyond your affection, what have I in this world to bring me anything more than a fleeting happiness ?'

'Would not a visit to Thalia at Corinth relieve you of these morbid fancies ?' said Ion over his shoulder.

'Perhaps you are right.' Tertius laughed, and then as quickly his face set again into its mould of melancholy.

'To tell you the truth, Ion, I have been bothered lately by the vision of a face. Where I have seen it, and why I should keep on thinking about it, I do not know.'

Ion's great shoulders shook with gusty mirth. 'Thalia would certainly be able to eradicate such visions in a day or two. But I would keep her in ignorance, her temper would not brook the slightest suggestion of rivalry . . . visionary or otherwise. But at any rate you can tell me what this wonderful beauty is that can vie with the charms of one of the most famous of Corinth's hetairai !'

Tertius opened his eyes ; they were blazing with a strange light. He disregarded with a grand contempt the ribald laughter that was still rumbling in Ion's throat, and leaping to his feet, started to pace up and down the little court-yard. After a turn or two he went and stood in front of Ion, and taking the ring from his hand, placed it in the coffer. 'Stop your gloating, I want your attention ; you will have plenty of time to gloat at home.'

'Well, speak on !' Ion clasped his hands over his rotund figure and looked attentive.

Tertius leant against the pillar, his eyes fixed on Ion's placid upturned face.

'It is the face of a man. A wonderful face. Lightly bearded so that the laughter lines about the mouth are hidden, except where they start at the corners of the nose. About the eyes there is a network of these lines, and the eyes themselves are heavy-lidded, I would say almost tired. The nose is aquiline, and the—— Oh, how paltry is the flesh ! How can I tell you of the spirit in that face ! Knowledge and love and suffering and experience lie in every wrinkle. There is a strange light shining from within ; the eyes of that man have seen their God. It is a look I have seen on no other face, and it is to the vision of that man's God that I have erected my shrine.' He stopped. His look had passed beyond Ion's round eyes to the depths of the shadow that gathered into darkness in the corner of the court-yard. It was of such intensity and passion that even the jovial Ion was silent, and the laughing words died on his lips.

'Where or when I saw this man I do not know,' Tertius continued, 'but there is his face shining for ever in my mind's eye, and I feel I cannot rest until I have found him. You will say it is fantastic. It is fantastic, and I may be mad, but like you and the emerald, it is stronger than I am.' With these last words, he went and placed his hands on Ion's shoulders and smiled down into his eyes. 'Now I have unburdened my mind I feel better. Dear Ion, the afternoon is creeping on ; already the sun must be dipping over Salamis. Take your emerald, and be off to Areopagus or you will be late.' He took the emerald from the coffer, and dropping it into a little padded bag put it into Ion's hand.

Ion rose. 'Yes, I should be going. Already I hear the crowd passing in the street. Paul of Tarsus, a Jew, is to speak before the judges on Areopagus. They say he has

much wisdom and a strange power. Come with me and hear him ; it will divert you.'

Tertius shook his head. 'No, I will not go, I am sick of all these wise men. I will watch the sun set from Lysabettus.'

Ion took his hand in both his own and pressed it, and his eyes filled with tears. 'You have made me very happy this day, and I thank you. It hurts me that I can do nothing to help you.'

'Why, you have given me most excellent advice. The air of Corinth will do me a world of good.' They both laughed, and still laughing, Ion crossed the court-yard and, lifting the latch, went out into the street. He moved along towards Areopagus at a steady pace, though every now and again the slow, loitering crowd hindered him. He would be a little late as it was, and no doubt miss the introductory speech. From afar he saw the people surging around Areopagus, and puffing steadily up the hill, he arrived upon the fringe of the crowd in time to see a small slender figure come forward upon the hill, in the circle of philosophers and judges, and flinging out his arms in a curiously compelling gesture, begin to speak.

Burrowing his massive body through the protesting crowd to get a little nearer, Ion lost the first few words, and then the deep musical voice of the little man on the hill penetrated his unheeding ear and brought him to a standstill, oblivious of the black looks and peremptory hissings of his neighbours.

'... as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, "To the unknown God."'

In the pause that followed there was a murmur among the crowd, like the ripple breathed over still waters by a fitful breeze.

'He speaks of Tertius' altar,' muttered Ion. And then the beautiful voice rose above the murmuring crowd, stunning it to silence.

'Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.'

Again there came a pause, but the crowd was now swayed into an expectant silence. Ion, staring up at the frail figure on the hill, hardly had time for the thought to form in his mind, 'I will get Tertius, this must be the God he seeks,' before once again the man's arms were flung out in that wild embracing gesture, and the hypnotic voice went on :

'God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; neither is worshipped with men's hands as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things' ; again that telling, breathless pause.

'I must get Tertius, he must hear this man.' Ion had turned, and was struggling his way through the crowd again. If he was quick he might just catch him before he set out for Lysabettus, and bring him back to hear the end of the speech. This was the man he sought—that wild pale face and close dark beard. No doubt Tertius, deep in some discussion with one of the old Stoic masters, had passed him when he was speaking in the market-place, or among the Jews, and had seen him all unknowing, with his spirit's eyes.

'At last.' Ion dodged the loiterers on the edge of the crowd, and hurried down the hill.

'... though he be not far from every one of us : for in him we live and move and have our being ; as certain also of your own poets have said . . . ' Gradually the great voice faded into the distance, and Ion doubled his pace till he bounded along at an elephantine jog-trot. The sweat

was dripping off his face as he crashed open the door of Tertius' house, and hurried into the court-yard. It was empty.

'Tertius,' he called, 'hey, Tertius,' but there was no answer.

A servant darted out, alarmed from the shadows. 'You call my Master? He has gone to Lysabettus, and thence he rides to Corinth for a few days. Is there a message for his return?'

Ion sank on to the couch. 'No, there is no message, it is too late.'

The servant bowed and withdrew.

Ion sat in a dejected heap on the couch. Well, he had done his best. It had been in his power to help, and he had tried, but it had been no use, and by now he had missed the greater part of the speech himself. Well, he would drag himself to Areopagus and hear what else this Paul of Tarsus had to say. He felt to see that the emerald was safe, and getting slowly up went out into the street. As he shut the door he suddenly remembered the little altar—the inanimate cause for all this animation in his leisurely life. He turned to it. The flowers lay dead, and there was a film of dust over it. Cleone, his little maid, had pinned a few fresh herbs inside his mantle, before he had come out. He unpinned them hastily, and strewed them in the niche, and then pulling his mantle straight upon his shoulders, turned towards Areopagus once again.

The picnic-party upon the slopes of Acro-Corinth was not a success. The slaves, carrying the litter on which Thalia lay, had stumbled several times on the way, and had jolted her severely. Dark thunder-clouds were gathering in the western sky; they filled the air with a tense oppressiveness that made her nervous and gave her a headache. To

add to everything else, Tertius was absent-minded and inattentive. Now, as the sun sank lower, it became entangled like a fiery ball in the network of clouds, and a queer lurid glow flowed like molten copper over land and sea.

'It is a fateful day. Since you bought those rainbow stones for me this morning, everything has gone wrong; I will return them this evening, and take instead the ring set with a jacinth.'

Thalia picked petulantly at the bracelet of opals on her slim wrist. Tertius sitting on the grass at her side, made no reply to her complaint, but continued to gaze moodily at the cloudy sky.

'Tertius, do you hear me?' She passed her soft hand through his thick black hair, and then in a sudden spasm of irritation clenched her fist and pulled his head back, and down on to her lap. Ordinarily he would have laughed, but to-day he wrenched his head away, leaving several black hairs still clutched in her hand. His eyes were blazing; they frightened her. She shrank away and began to cry. Crying usually did the trick when necessary, but to-day her little helpless sobs and pretty tear-filled eyes were powerless in the face of this strange Tertius who sat staring away from her, completely unmoved. Soon her feigned distress became the real thing, and only then did he turn. She saw with relief that the white angry look had gone, and a queer new tenderness was in his eyes as he took her hands and kissed them. 'Poor thing, I am sorry, but I am not well, and it affects my temper.' She was all softness and consolation at once.

'My Tertius, we will call at the Hall of Æsculapius on our return; there they will find a remedy for any ill.'

He laughed. 'Have they a remedy for a failure and a discontented one at that?'

Thalia stared at him in astonishment. 'You, a failure? Why, you have everything—riches, good looks, and a great gift as a poet. What more do you want?'

Tertius looked away. 'Yes, I have the first; the second is neither here nor there. I am glad I haven't cross eyes or a strawberry nose for your sake as well as mine. But the last'—he shrugged his shoulders—'the last, if I have got it, is spreading wings to fly from me, instead of carrying me with it over the flowery domains of the muses, as Plato suggests so prettily in one of his dialogues. I cannot bear its going; the fact that it can go means that it is not the real thing, and that is very bitter.'

Thalia stroked his head a moment before she spoke. 'I think the lobster that we ate is lying heavy on you. I have known lobster to cause acute depression before now.'

Tertius lay back with a loud whoop that frightened several peaceful magpies into agitated flight, and laughed till the tears were in his eyes; then he sat up. 'What a lovely thought, and how like you, my Thalia. All the wisdom of the great Aspasia is as nothing compared with the unutterable truths that tumble so glibly from your shapely mouth. It sounds so well, that the poet Tertius should suffer from a lobster-sorrow.' He leaped to his feet. 'But come, we should be off, especially if you wish to change the bracelet for a ring. And too, I hear thunder rumbling.' He clapped his hands, and the slaves came running with the litter.

Stretching and yawning like a sleepy kitten, Thalia got to her feet, and sat on the edge of the litter, dangling her legs over the side. At a word of command from the head man, the slaves moved off, and Tertius walked beside Thalia holding her hand.

The slow even pace of the slaves was soothing; he fell

into step with them, and the little procession moved steadily along the gradual descent to Corinth.

Once again his thoughts surged up, and he became oblivious to everything, except these strange problems and visions that had been troubling him for the past few weeks.

Ever since he could remember, he had been used to adulation. Men would hang upon his words ; and he had that rare gift of stimulating discussion, that is as much personality as intellect. Since the death of Daphne, marriage had never been in his thoughts ; and such as she did not mingle in the social life of the city, but stayed at home with their mothers, learning the domestic arts, and only left the parental roof for the equally strict seclusion of their husband's home. But women, hardened courtesans, who sought him out, drawn by the glamour of his wealth, would bow their heads and turn away, forgetful of everything, except that sudden, unwonted tension of their poor stale hearts at the quick blue gaze of his eyes. When women made that little involuntary, submissive movement, he knew quite well that he had only to lift his finger and they would come to him. It had been amusing to use this strange power of his, and then suddenly he had sickened of it. He remembered the temple at Sunion on that stormy day five years before, he remembered the click of the sardonix as it fell to the ground from the stiffening hand of Daphne ; all his fine powers and prayers had been of no avail then, and suddenly he became frightened at the frailty of his humanity. Troubled and uneasy, he watched the passing crowds, and saw the sad faces, and the discontented faces, and the proud faces. Only the children seemed to be able to lift clear eyes and happiness to the arch of blue above Athens. And then suddenly, from a complete void, the wonderful pale face of the unknown man thrust itself into his mind's eye, and he forgot all else except

it. 'If I take my problems to this man,' he said, 'they will be solved.'

'Tertius !' At the sound of Thalia's voice breaking in upon his thoughts, he tightened his grasp on her small hand.

'Yes !'

'I have an idea, a most excellent idea. We will stop at the Sacred Fountain of Peirene, and you shall drink of the waters. It is said that they fill those who drink with the fires of inspiration and of love.'

Tertius smiled. 'A pretty idea. My old nurse used to tell me of the Sacred Fountain of Peirene, struck out from the rock by the swift wild hoof of Pegasus. I will drink to please you, and in memory of her, whose old heart used to thrill at those sweet legendary tales.'

Already the sounds of Corinth were floating up on the still sultry air—the cries of vendors, the shrill voices of children, and the clatter of wheels over the pavements. In ten minutes' time they were in a surging mob of people ; the idle staring crowd that gathers in every town of a summer evening, chattering in groups, moving slowly along in twos and threes, or standing in clusters in the doorways of the shops. Every now and again a litter would go by, bearing one of the great colony of Hetairai, the fame of whose beauty was a byword all over Greece, and indeed had reached as far as Rome itself. The small outer courtyard of the fountain, with its stone bench encircling it, was empty save for two men and a woman, who sat together in a corner, talking too busily to notice the entry of the litter, and its attendant commotion.

After the swift turbulence of the streets, the court-yard was a pleasant little pool of peace and silence, and Tertius breathed a sigh of relief. 'And now'—he took Thalia's hands in his—'I go to drink of the Sacred Spring ; but first

a kiss from the most beautiful woman in Corinth, so that her kiss may mingle with the waters of inspiration, and I be drunk with love and poetry !'

The slaves had lowered the litter to the ground, and kneeling beside it he pressed his lips upon the full sweetness of Thalia's. When he rose, she lay still, her eyes close shut, a little pulse pounding at the base of her smooth throat.

It was dark inside the arches that sheltered the spring. He knelt on the steps, and holding with one hand to a ledge, carried the icy water in the cupped hollow of the other to his lips.

The pure freshness of the water was unbelievable, no wonder that magic powers were attributed to it. He dipped his hand for more. At that moment a wild stab of pain shot up the hand and arm that held the ledge. There was a rustle among the little dripping ferns. A viper. He scrambled up the steps out into the court-yard. The pain came in a blinding rush, and wrung a muffled cry from him. Thalia peered at him from the litter with frightened eyes ; and then the smaller of the two men came across to him. 'What is the matter ? You are ill ?' Tertius held out his hand, and the little wound upon his wrist showed plainly. 'A snake-bite.' The man questioned no further, but seizing Tertius' hand in his, placed his lips upon the wound, and sucked and spat, sucked and spat till he was breathless ; and then tearing a strip of material from his mantle, bound it in an agonising tightness about Tertius' arm.

'I am sorry, but I must hurt you,' he said. He took a small knife from his wallet, and made two sharp gashes through the wound, so that the blood poured out upon the ground. Tertius was breathless with pain. 'Aquila,' the man, still holding Tertius' hand in his, turned to his companion—'run to the Hall of Æsculapius, and ask for the

crystals that remedy a snake-bite. Quick !' Aquila hurried off. 'And now if the lady permits, you will sit on the litter, and await his return.'

Thalia, who throughout the proceedings had sat numb with horror, sprang up. 'Dear Tertius, does it hurt ? I am so sorry that I caused you all this pain. It was all my idea. I am so sorry.' She clung to him, with little sobs.

'It is nothing, because my good friend here acted promptly. I confess I was bewildered.'

The man, leading Tertius to the litter, laughed. 'I am used to sudden alarms, and I am glad that I was of use. There now, settle yourself comfortably, but don't lie down as yet.'

Tertius leant back upon the cushions that Thalia was heaping behind his back. The man still held his hand, holding the wrist over the edge of the litter so that the blood, which still fell in a slow trickle, should not soil the silk. He knelt beside the litter, the front of his own garments soaked in Tertius' blood, stroking the purple blotchy arm with a delicate tenderness. 'Not a word, and I hurt you sorely, I fear.' For the first time he turned his head and looked straight at Tertius, and for the first time in the painful agitation of the last few moments, Tertius raised his eyes and looked at him. The formal words of thanks were never uttered. Filled with a sudden rapture of peacefulness and mysterious content, Tertius, his eyes still fixed on the noble tired face, bending so tenderly over him, murmured : 'How strange ! I thought that you had been a bigger man.'

BY THE WAY.

Over Earth, like a hawk above summer woods,
 Hangs the menace renewed of world-hate.
 Statesmen, casting troubled glances skywards,
 Scurry from place to place,
 Feverishly they tie and retie papers,
 Orotundly they speak, labouring with plans and hope ;
 The people, massed in brick-land by the million,
 Start on holiday, blotting out thought,
 Or peer into bleakness, sick with apprehension.
 The old are a-quiver with stabs of memory,
 Murmuring one to another, 'shades of 1914 !'
 The young, shrugging shoulders, declaim subservience to the new
 machine-age
 And air belief in both dictators and passivity.

Father of Destiny, Moulder of minds, Arbiter of Peace and War,
 In numberless English homes
 Parents to-day subconsciously frame a single prayer,
 That they may still be able to feed on You in their hearts
 By faith with thanksgiving—
 The only worth-while prayer is for the most difficult attainment.

* * *

Olivia, who had much sense, was known to be unable to appreciate yellow stockings : what, it may be wondered, would be her attitude to her own if she were living now ? If anyone were to walk abroad to-day in places where women do congregate with a penny promised him for

every pair he saw adorning the limbs of any woman under seventy which were of a different colour ('sun-tan', I am told they call it), he would return home at the day's end not a whit wealthier than when he set out. There are, it is true, some slight variations of tone, but that is all : every single woman to-day goes about in stockings of a shade designed to make it appear that her legs are stockingless—the only exceptions anywhere to be found are of those which actually are, as is provable on close—very close—inspection. It is as though every man had elected to wear no tie that was not blue ; it is in truth an almost incredible, and yet actual, monotony. In former days if one with any pretensions to taste were to be told that everyone else was wearing such and such a shade, she chose something different : to-day all assimilate themselves rigorously to their neighbours. And the significance would appear to be great. The one need of the modern world is individuality, the supreme danger is mass-mentality without thought. Individuality was never so important as in days when there is least of it, danger was never greater than when a whole nation acts automatically, when no member of it does, or dares to, think for himself or herself. We see the effects of mechanized thought to-day in Japan, where many and many a citizen, in reality, hates the Chinese crime : we saw it in Italy, where many, in reality, had no welcome to give to the Führer ; we have seen it in Germany on many occasions of late—and those of us who still read the Bible remember the fate that befell those that all ran together unthinkingly : they came, so it is recorded, to a steep place, with an inevitable result.

* * *

For some days my youngest rascal had been saying his

prayers to himself : it occurred to his mother one evening that it might be advisable to listen in again, so he was bidden to repeat them aloud. With an air of conscious rectitude he duly implored his Creator,

*Let my friends be all forgiven ;
Bless the sins I love so well.*

Can anyone put hand to heart and declare that this is not exactly what one sometimes truly longs to pray ? It is probable that there were understanding smiles in Heaven.

* * *

We have reached the month that is of all others bookless—or should be, to all right-thinking people, if the phrases may here be used by which every journalist describes only those who agree with him. There are obviously only two main uses for a book in August : first, to place gently over the upturned face so as to prevent the rays of the sun unduly penetrating the closed eyelids ; secondly, to remove from the trunk and stand in a neat row on a prominent shelf or table—for the first, any book will do, provided it is not heavy ; for the second, it is essential that the books be ones which the owner (or borrower) has always meant to read and never has had time to ; at the end of the holiday they should be dusted and replaced in the trunk. Every year newspapers take up space and mildly irritate their readers by printing several columns of comments on what they are pleased to call ‘ holiday reading ’—but then, as is well known, newspapers are habitually and inherently purveyors of misconception rather than formers of public opinion. People—right-thinking people, that is—do not read on holiday ; they only pretend to, and not that always.

* * *

And yet there are matters over which to ponder—murder,

for instance, just the thing on holiday, and the murderers (on paper) are still numerous. Constable publishes two tales of this kind which are interesting for their differences, one the work of an old practitioner, Henry Wade, who has put together a series of adventures experienced by a young constable ambitious to be a detective, under the infelicitous title, *Here Comes the Copper* (7s. 6d. n.); this is not Henry Wade's vintage port but a pleasant enough beverage for seaside reading; none of the series unduly excite or mystify, but all adequately entertain. The other is, so we are told, 'a new type of detective story by a new writer': it is very difficult nowadays to invent a new type of detective story and *Death Walks Softly* (7s. 6d. n.) is hardly that; but the author, Neal Shepherd, is a new writer and a promising one; it is true that by allowing his detectives to take for granted just one matter (in respect of a point on which no good detective would have taken anything for granted) and only one, he points out the real criminal unmistakably to any hardened reader of this type of story, but many even yet are not hardened and he is fresh and ingenious—and, in brief, provides excellent 'holiday reading.'

* * *

A detective story that actually is of a new type, though in this case not by a new writer, is to be found in Verrier Elwin's *A Cloud That's Dragonish* (Murray, 7s. 6d. n.). Mr. Elwin knows the primitive people of Central India as no one else does; for years he has lived with and worked for the Gonds and combated their leprosy, and he has written two previous books about them, one a daily diary of fact, the other a fictional presentation of the same set of facts. Both were good, but this, his third, is also his best: it is

fiction, it is drama, it is also fact—a stirring and even tense story of evil, superstition, crime, and love, all at work among these primitive peoples, written by one who not only knows but loves them.

★ ★ ★

From murder to St. Helena is but a step—not the ordinary step by which the hater of war regards Napoleon as a great murderer, but that by which attention lingers round the scene illogically. People will stand for hours gazing at a house where a crime was once committed, they are interested in St. Helena solely because it was once the prison of Napoleon, and yet as Mr. Philip Gosse points out in his new book, *St. Helena 1502-1938* (Cassell, 15s. n.), it 'has a vivid history of 436 years and has been in unbroken possession of Great Britain for 255.' He justly remarks that its Napoleonic period is 'over-written' and reduces those six years to their relative values: they occupy but one of his 14 chapters and it would be unfair to the others to say that that is the most interesting. Nevertheless, when all is told, St. Helena still means Napoleon, and its Governor (in spite of the list of 72 names from the first possession of the island by the English East India Company in 1657 to to-day) is Lieut.-Col. Sir Hudson Lowe.

★ ★ ★

One of the most pleasant features about CORNHILL—one of many, let us hope—is that it has never been a respecter of persons: writers of distinction have offered wares to it and received them back again if they were not of their best, writers whose laurels were but in bud have found those buds bursting under its warming encouragement. It is noteworthy how many whose early work has appeared in CORNHILL have since been recognized elsewhere; and now there

has to be added Miss Margaret Stanley-Wrench, who won the Newdigate after her work had won its way to these columns and has now published her first volume of verse, *News Reel and other Poems* (Macmillan, 5s. n.). Here is the modern, but not what is termed the 'modernist,' that is to say, here is sensitive individuality and not insensate eccentricity. Miss Stanley-Wrench has borne in mind Ellen Terry's saying, 'Before you can be eccentric you must know where the centre of the circle is.' This is work of promise perhaps rather than of performance, but we look with confident hope to the fulfilment of the promise in the future. An interesting volume of youth.

* * *

Gossip-writers must move in good society if their lives and labours are to be of lasting interest: Princess Lieven amply fulfilled that requirement, and now Dr. H. Montgomery Hyde has supplemented the admirable editing last year by Peter Quennell of her private letters to her lover, Prince Metternich, and produced a full-length biography, *Princess Lieven* (Harrap, 12s. 6d. n.). She was an indefatigable political gossip and intriguer and had, and made, every opportunity for the exercise of her talents: no work about her could fail to be lively, and Dr. Hyde does not fail—it is a little less certain that she and her letters entirely deserve so much attention as has now been bestowed upon them, and yet she is undeniably an unusual and even an important personage in the many scenes in which she exercised tongue and pen, and many are those who figure in them with her, from Metternich to Guizot.

G.

THE 'CORNHILL' COMPETITION.

DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 178.

PRIZES of books to the value of £1, from John Murray's catalogue, are offered to the two solvers whose letters are first opened. Answers, containing the coupon from page iv, must be addressed to the Acrostic Editor, 50 Albemarle Street, W.1, and must reach him by 31st August.

- _____, _____, and pen
 Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower
 Have forfeited their ancient English dower'
1. 'The _____, most heedful,
 Receive each mild spirit,
 New worlds to inherit.'
 2. 'With his cruel bow he laid full _____
 The harmless Albatross.'
 3. 'A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd
 One _____ like thee—tameless, and swift, and proud'
 4. 'Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
 To take into the _____ my quiet breath;'
 5. 'Have drunk their Cup a _____ or two before,
 And one by one crept silently to rest.'

Answer to Acrostic 176, June number: 'If to these precepts you attend,
 No second letter need I send' (Matthew Prior: 'A Letter'). 1. Still
 (Keats: 'Ode to a Grecian Urn'). 2. E'E (Allan Cunningham:
 'Hame, Hame, Hame'). 3. ChariotesT (Shelley: 'Ode to the West
 Wind'). 4. OuT (Swinburne: 'Hertha'). 5. NoisE (Tennyson:
 'In Memoriam'). 6. DeaR (Montrose: 'I'll never love thee more').

The first correct answers opened were sent by Miss E. M. Elfatrick,
 Ruyton, The Avenue, Alderley Edge, Cheshire, and Miss Todhunter,
 Riverdene, Bourne End, Bucks, who are invited to choose books as
 mentioned above. N.B.—Sources need not be given.

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